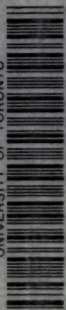


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



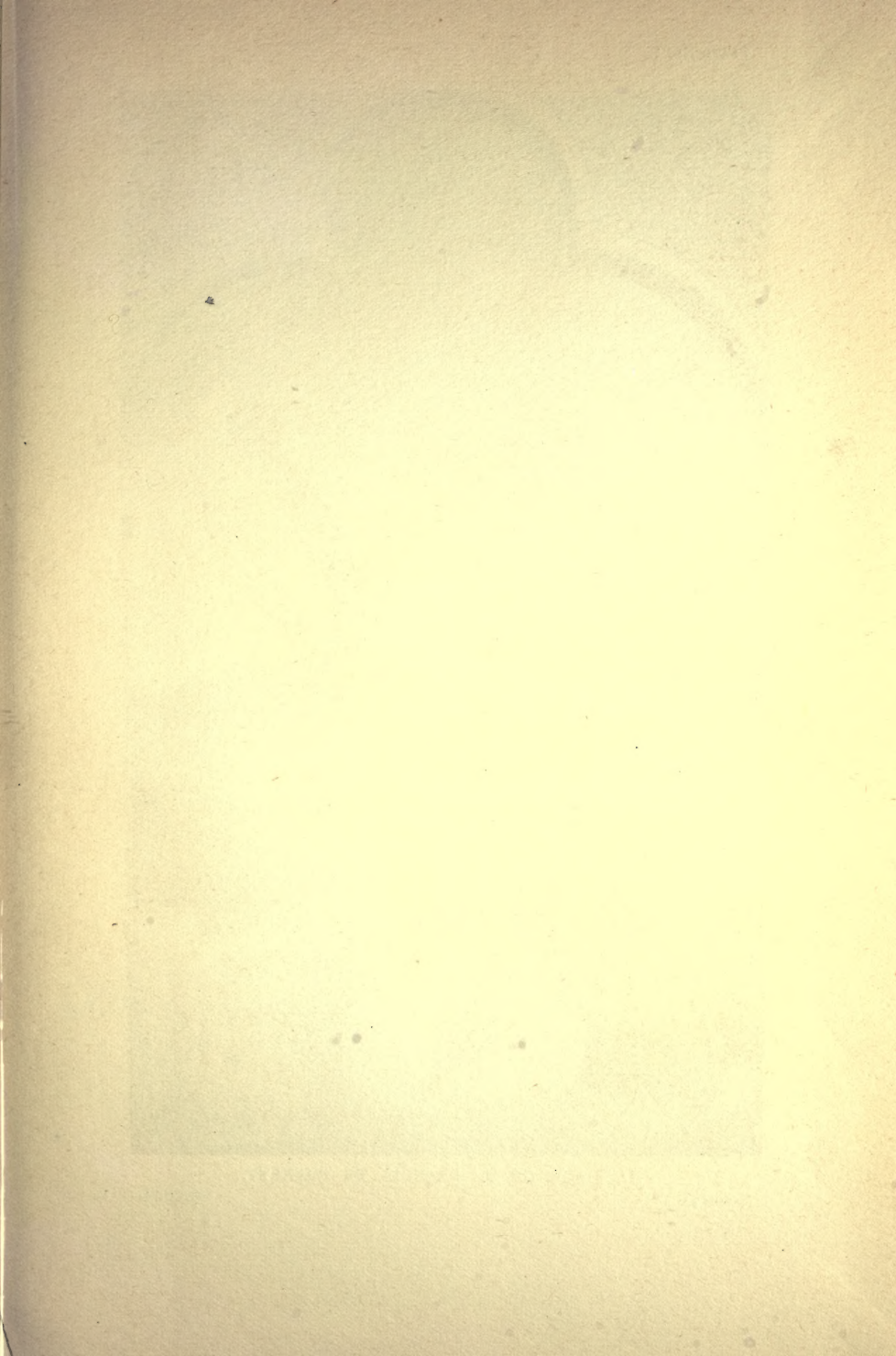
3 1761 01098921 8





A SIENESE PAINTER
OF THE
FRANCISCAN LEGEND

All rights reserved





MARRIAGE OF St. FRANCIS TO POVERTY.

SASSETTA.

Chantilly.

Paint
B

A SIENESE PAINTER

OF THE

FRANCISCAN LEGEND

BY
BERNARD BERENSON



TWENTY-SIX
ILLUSTRATIONS
IN COLLOTYPE

363467
28. 2. 39.

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS, LTD.

29 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

1910

FIRST EDITION, *December 1909*
Reprinted, July 1910

TO
THE MEMORY
OF
STANISLAS REMBIELINSKI

PREFACE

I THANK the Editor of the *Burlington Magazine* for the permission to republish the articles which make up this small book.

They gave rise to certain misunderstandings which were probably due, in the first place, to the fact that they touch too rapidly upon too many things, and in the second place to a question of emphasis. I had hoped to help clear my meaning by adding three other essays, elaborating what I had to say about the religious painting of China and Japan, about imaginative design, and above all about the claims of illustration as a separate art.

But I have found no time for this in the six years that have passed ; and as I do not look forward to greater leisure in the

next few years, I let these articles take book-form without the required accompaniment and support.

The more reason to beg the reader not to mistake my meaning. He must not go away with the irrational conclusion that because Sassetta, as I attempt to prove, could express Franciscan ideals better than Giotto, I therefore regard him as the greater artist; or that contrary to what I have tried to say elsewhere, I now consider illustration more important than decoration.

And yet it is a pleasure to be able to exonerate Giotto from the blame attaching to the author of the frescoes over the tomb of St. Francis at Assisi. Without reference to the thesis presented here, and in an entirely different connection, my more recent studies have convinced me that these were not the work of the great Florentine. Quite independently Professor Adolfo Venturi has reached the same results, and I trust that they soon

PREFACE

ix

will be accepted by all mature, comprehensive students of Italian painting. Connoisseurship will thus again prove itself the loyal supporter of a sound æsthetic.

B. B.

Oct. 1909.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I. SASSETTA.—MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS TO POVERTY. CHANTILLY . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
II. SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.—MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS TO POVERTY. ASSISI . .	<i>Facing page 5</i>
III. SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.—ALLEGORY OF CHAS- TITY. ASSISI	" " 9
IV. SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.—ALLEGORY OF OBEDI- ENCE. ASSISI	" " 8
V. SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.—GLORY OF ST. FRANCIS. ASSISI	" " 8
VI. ALBERT DÜRER.—MASS OF ST. GREGORY	" " 12
VII. BUDDHIST PAINTING.—BOSTON, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS	" " 13
VIII. SASSETTA.—FRANCIS AND BEGGAR, AND DREAM OF FRANCIS. PARIS, M. CHA- LANDON	" " 21
IX. GIOTTO.—FRANCIS AND BEGGAR. ASSISI .	" " 20
X. GIOTTO.—DREAM OF FRANCIS. ASSISI .	" " 22
XI. SASSETTA.—FRANCIS RENOUNCING HIS HERI- TAGE. PARIS, M. CHALANDON . . .	" " 25
XII. GIOTTO.—FRANCIS RENOUNCING HIS HERI- TAGE. ASSISI	" " 24

xii LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

XIII. SASSETTA.—ST. FRANCIS AND WOLF OF GUBBIO. CHÂTEAU DE BEAUMONT, COMTE DE MARTEL. . . .	<i>Facing page 25</i>
XIV. SASSETTA.—ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE SOLDAN. PARIS, M. CHALANDON . . .	" " 27
XV. GIOTTO.—ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE SOLDAN. FLORENCE, S. CROCE . . .	" " 26
XVI. SASSETTA.—ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE POPE. PARIS, M. CHALANDON . . .	" " 28
XVII. SASSETTA.—ST. FRANCIS RECEIVING STIG- MATA. PARIS, M. CHALANDON . . .	" " 29
XVIII. GIOTTO.—FUNERAL OF ST. FRANCIS. FLORENCE, S. CROCE	" " 31
XIX. SASSETTA.—FUNERAL OF ST. FRANCIS. PARIS, M. CHALANDON	" " 30
XX. SASSETTA.—GLORY OF ST. FRANCIS. FLORENCE, MR. BERENSON	" " 43
XXI. TADDEO DI BARTOLO.—GLORY OF ST. FRANCIS. PERUGIA	" " 42
XXII. SASSETTA.—TRIPTYCH. SIENA, OSSER- VANZA	" " 49
XXIII. SASSETTA.—POLYPTYCH. ASCIANO . . .	" " 56
XXIV. SASSETTA.—POLYPTYCH. CORTONA . . .	" " 59
XXV. SASSETTA.—ADORATION OF MAGI. SIENA, SARACENI COLLECTION	" " 64
XXVI. SASSETTA.—ASSUMPTION. BERLIN . . .	" " 66

PART I

A SIENESE PAINTER .

OF THE

FRANCISCAN LEGEND

PART I

POETRY and the figure arts seldom keep pace in their evolution. A great movement in the minds of men, the yearnings which inspired it, the strong feelings it engendered, will have found expression in song and legend long before sculpture and painting stir with the new life. We may go farther and say that it is only when literature has translated an epoch into a series of splendid myths, that the figure arts can be called in to give the ideals of that epoch visual form. Even then, the chances are few that the arts will achieve the desired end. So much stands in their way ; their form and technique may not be sufficiently advanced ; or they may be themselves required to do what the figure arts, in their nature, cannot accomplish. If the first is the case, the expression of the idea will remain incomplete,

4 A SIENESE PAINTER OF

although a masterpiece of archaic art may be the result ; if the second, if sculpture and painting be asked to do what is beyond their scope, they produce something that, for the initiated, may serve as the sign or symbol of an idea, but can have no value, as art at least, to outsiders.

Thus the Franciscan movement had had time to conquer western Christendom, and, like many another glorious hope of immediate redemption, to muddle itself into one of those pathetic make-shifts wherein humanity's weak flesh takes happy refuge after being tempted of the spirit ; it had had time to inspire prose of angelic candour, and verse which sang of man's reconquered union with nature and its Creator (for so much had there been time) before the legend of its adorable founder received, at Giotto's hands, something like adequate pictorial expression.

That Giotto and his companions, painting the legend of St. Francis, created great works of art will be conceded ; but do these grand frescoes embody the spirit and teaching of the saint ? If we would know, we must imagine that, unaware that Francis had ever existed, we were stepping for the first time into the upper church at Assisi. Looking along the wall, we should see a series of paintings which we should readily recog-

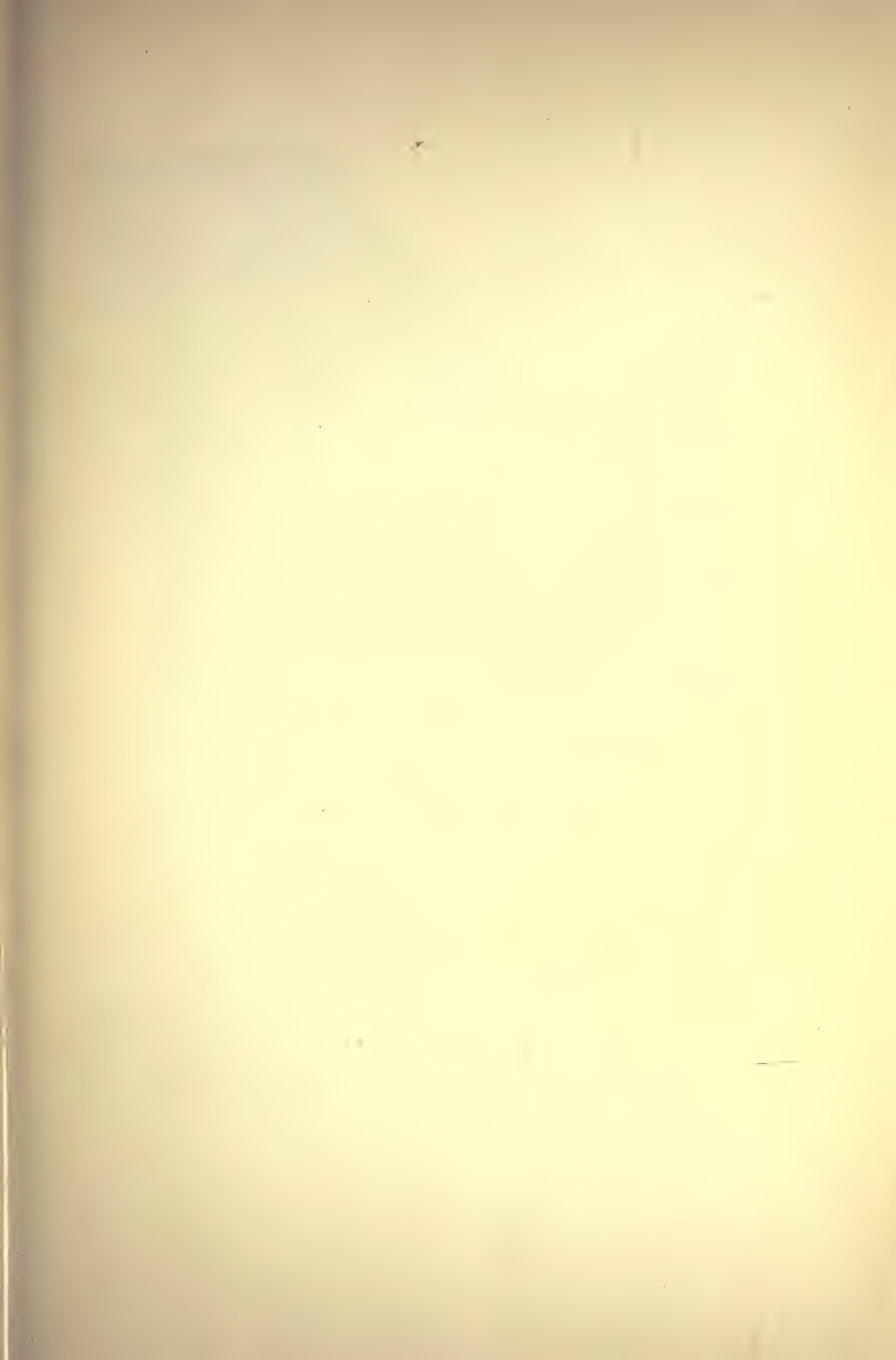


PLATE No. II.



MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS TO POVERTY.

SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.

Anderson, Rome.

Acad.

nise as depicting so many events in the career of a remarkable man. So clearly and vividly is the story recounted, that we could not help piecing together a history that would have no little likeness to the more outward events of the saint's life. We should conclude that he had been a mighty worker of miracles, a man of gracious, even splendid presence, who must have been singularly at one with nature—seeing that we find him admonishing the birds by the roadside; who must have enjoyed many moments of ecstasy, such as we see depicted where he kneels in rapt converse with a seraph; who must have inspired such love as we behold expressed in the mourning over him when dead.

But is this the Francis who composed the "Canticle to the Sun"? Is this the knight-errant of Lady Poverty, the hero of the legend of the "Three Companions" and of the "Mirror of Perfection"? Is this the saint of Celano's less inspired story, or even of Bonaventure's official chronicle?

It will be said that, before going farther, we should wind down the inner staircase from the upper to the lower church at Assisi, and, in the dim, horizontal light of the transept, look at the four paintings on the ceiling. There, over the

6 A SIENESE PAINTER OF

tomb of the seraphic saint, the attempt has been made, not to recount his story as in the Church above, but to body forth his spirit and his message.

Again be it understood that we are not concerned now with these frescoes as works of art in the more specific sense. We shall consider only the world they create, the air they give us to breathe. In one we are present at a wedding. A sleek young monk is espousing a ragged, bony, forbiddingly stern female. Angels look on with eagerness and sympathy, and two of them fly up, one with raiment and another with a castle, toward which two hands stretch out from the invisible. No imaginative spectator would need to be told that the scene is allegorical, and represents the marriage of a monk to Poverty. So much success the artist has attained : he has given a self-revealing form to an allegory. True, literature had made his task relatively easy ; yet all praise to the painter. But either he was thinking too literally of the story, his imagination incapable of soaring to its transcendent significance, or his art lacked the means of presentation. At all events, here is not the air we breathe when reading of evangelical poverty as it was understood by the Little Poor Man of Assisi and all his loyal followers.

Another of these frescoes brings us to a castle.

In its keep sits a woman, to whom two angels present a crown and a palm. Below a youth is receiving baptism at the hands of angels. Elderly warriors stand on guard, but on the right a blind-folded claw-footed imp is driven out by the spears and pitchforks of angels, and on the left a youth is given a helping hand by the same sleek monk whose acquaintance we made in his espousals to Poverty. Regarded as allegory, this composition is such a failure that we should be at a loss for the figurative meaning, if the painter had not labelled the lady in the tower as "Castitas," the claw-footed imp as "Amor," &c. &c. Leave all these considerations to one side, however, and consider what is presented to the eyes alone: I ask what these figures tell us of chastity, and all that that virtue meant to the blessed Francis? Nothing surely that Francis felt, and little that he thought.

Happier certainly than the last is the third of these triangular compositions. Under a portico sits a hushed figure with her finger to her mouth, herself yoked, imposing a yoke upon a kneeling monk. The kneeling angels and the other figures to right and to left are, it is true, indifferent to the scene; the saint standing on the roof of the portico between two scroll-bearing angels detracts from its significance rather than adds to it; but the action

and gestures of the two protagonists are so solemn the symbolism is so natural, that, as in the Espousals, we need scarcely be told that the subject is an allegory of obedience. And yet, as before, the spiritual atmosphere into which we are plunged is not the atmosphere Francis breathed. Here there is no "perfect blitheness," but, on the contrary, much of the grim coldness wherewith the ordinary person encounters the idea of submission.

In the three scenes already examined, the figure of the saint plays a relatively subordinate part. In a fourth composition we behold seated on a throne a monk of stolid rather than spiritual countenance, holding a cross like a sceptre in the one hand and a book in the other. He emits from his body rays like the sun, and is encircled by angels who pipe and play, and sing and dance. Above the canopy of the throne we read the words *Gloriosus Franciscus*. One wonders what Jacopone da Todi, Giovanni della Vernia, Ubertino da Casale, or any other of the faithful followers of the selfless Umbrian saint would have said upon seeing him thus reduced—and after only seventy years—to little more than a mere idol! As for us to-day, unless we read knowledge acquired elsewhere into these paintings, we must conclude that, besides living and working miracles, as recounted in the

PLATE No. III.



PLATE No. IV.



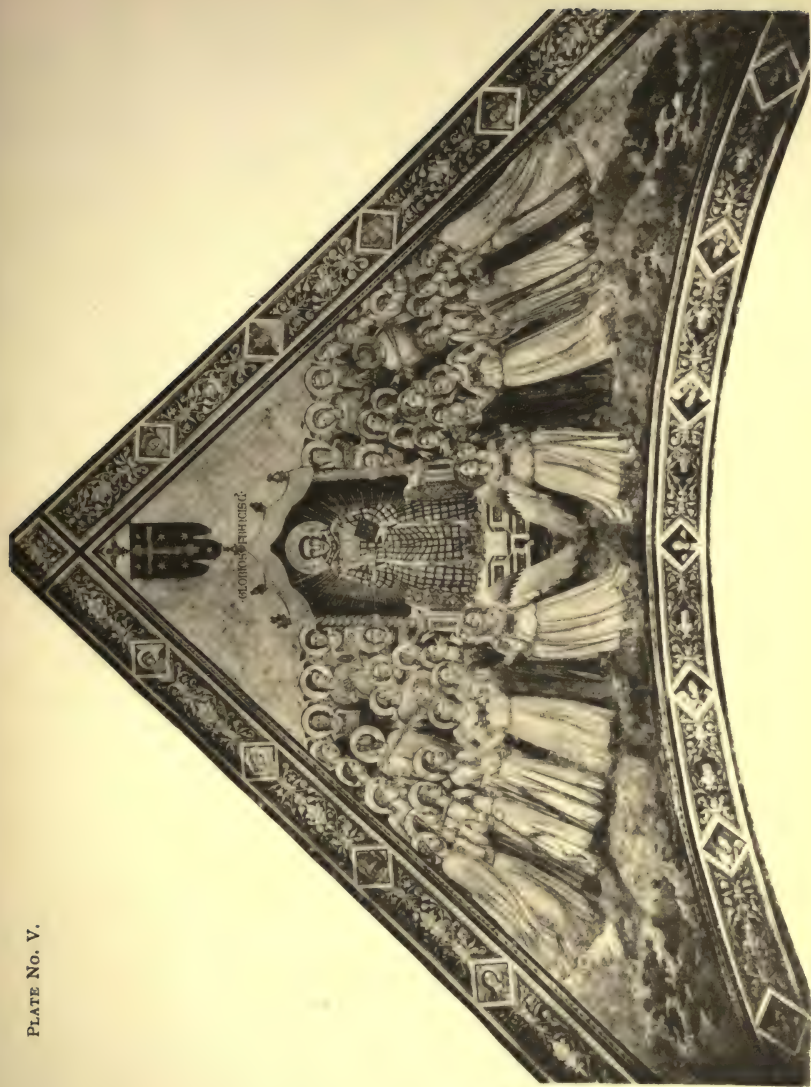
ALLEGORY OF OBEDIENCE.

SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.

Anderson, Rome.

Assisi.





GLORY OF ST. FRANCIS.

Alinari.

Assisi.

SCHOOL OF GIOTTO.



frescoes of the upper church, the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience were the principal tenets of St. Francis's teaching, and that he ended by becoming himself an object of worship.

Those who have drunk from the sources of pure Franciscan literature, from the founder's own writings to the *Fioretti*,¹ and who can look at painting with such innocence of mind and eye that they get from it no more than it really gives them, will be somewhat startled that so little of the peculiarly and specifically seraphic should be communicated to them by these frescoes at Assisi. In the upper church, the saint was at least a gracious presence, a commanding personality. In the frescoes over the tomb he is a mere monk, and most monkish of all in the apotheosis. As if mere monkishness were in any way the essential characteristic of Francis, the most uncloistered, the most loving, the most busily well-doing, the most social of free spirits! For he, if ever any historical person, was a free spirit. He came nearer perhaps than any other European man to that rarest and most unattainable of emancipations,

¹ To those who have not, and indeed to everybody, I recommend the few pages of almost perfect characterisation of St. Francis by Father Cuthbert, which, under the title of "The Spiritual Significance of Evangelical Poverty," will be found appended to Mr. Carmichael's admirable "Lady Poverty." [London, John Murray, 1901.]

the emancipation from one's self. His cardinal doctrine, which he taught by the example of his life and the contagion of his spirit, was therefore that of poverty. For him poverty did not consist in hankering after things that either our incompetence or misfortune prevents us from possessing, but in the very contrary. He deliberately would possess nothing, for thus only can sordid care and cankering worry be kept from oppressing one's soul. And his soul he would keep unburdened, undiminished, free—free to be at one with the universe, and free to attempt to reconcile the universe with itself.

How much of all this is communicated to us by the paintings at Assisi? Very little surely. In so far as Giotto is responsible for these works, it may be said that he was still young, and that his sense for spiritual significance was still undeveloped. The answer is that in his ripest years, at S. Croce, he returned to the legend of Francis, recounting it with little if any increase of specifically Franciscan feeling.¹ With more reason might it be questioned whether the arts of design possess the means of conveying anything resembling seraphic spirituality. It might be argued

¹ Since this was first published, I have come to the conclusion that the Allegories in the Lower Church are not from Giotto's own hand, but by one or two close followers who derived their inspiration from him.

that Giotto extracted from his subject all that painting could express ; that art necessarily drags down and distorts subjects that it is incapable of treating, quite as much as such subjects are apt to play havoc with art, but that the result in this instance was all that could have been desired, seeing that the frescoes are of a kind *qualis sensuali populo ingereret sue eminentia sanctitatis*—of a kind to inspire the common people with a sense of the saint's pre-eminence.

If these arguments were valid, they would go a great way to justify the banishment of the figure arts by Moses and Mahomet. But are they true ? Are the figure arts incapable of conveying a sense of things spiritual ?

If we confined our attention to European art alone, it would almost seem so, for our painting is apparently powerless to get out of the human figure more than an expression of heroism, of grandeur, of the superhuman—always something in the nature of the physically impressive. But if we turn to the extreme Orient, we find that their arts of design do convey a sense of spiritual things. Their saints are frequently hideous ; their converted hobgoblins and demons are, as they should be, fiendish ; but all are spiritualised through and through, and in every look, in every

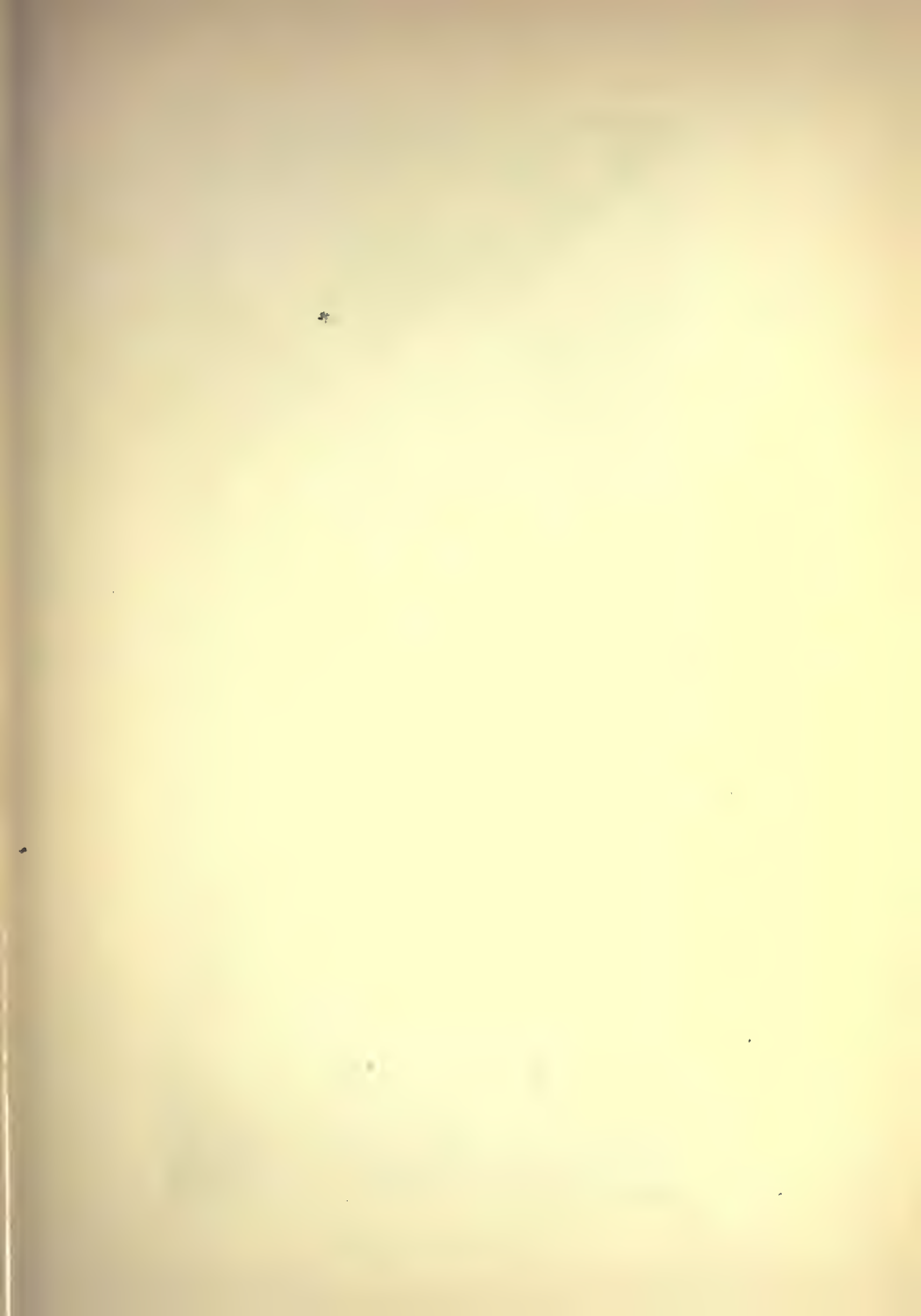
gesture, manifest the life of the spirit. Think of the curious fact that, after more than eighteen centuries of Christianity, our art has not yet created a single adequate image of its Founder, while the Buddhist world soon incarnated its ideal Gautama in a form which left no room for change. Consider the dumbness or sterile wordiness of our art when it attempts to convey a sense of worship, of personal communion with the Deity. Dürer was as spiritually minded a painter as we have had, and his hand was the obedient instrument of his mind. In a famous wood-cut he treats a theme which can scarcely be surpassed as a subject for the Christian artist. While St. Gregory is saying mass, the altar is turned into a tomb whereon he beholds the Lord in the midst of the instruments of the Passion. Christ makes an appeal for pity which is met with a look and gesture of mere surprise on the part of the saint, and of indifference from the bystanders. Only the acolyte kneels contritely, and only an angel shows sympathy. Contrast with this a Chinese painting of the twelfth century, one of a series of forty-four, recounting the legend of the five hundred rakan, or Buddhist saints. "The mystical significance of this picture is startling." "One hears in the oral tradition of esoteric



MASS OF ST. GREGORY.

DÜRER.







BUDDHIST PAINTING.

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

Buddhism of crypts and caves deep in the recesses of sacred mountains, where the holy of holies is unveiled to the eyes of the masters. Here an altar in three tiers of stone has been raised, and upon it has been deposited a bundle of scrolls, doubtless scripture, and probably believed to be some holy original of Buddha's date. About it, in the attitude of prayer, stand the rakan who have brought to the mystic rite five Chinese laymen. In this solemn cave is performed the miracle of fire's descending upon the books, which, so far from being consumed, shed pencils of rainbow rays out to all space. The simple, unaffected grouping adds to the impressiveness. One can feel the all-conquering force that radiates from the altar, fills the cave, and drives into its furthest corner, in a bewildering group, the unprepared laymen. The figure of one who throws himself backward toward the spectator, in a frenzy of adoration, is especially striking."¹ The spiritual interpretation of this painting is indeed great,

¹ E. F. Fenollosa, "Catalogue of a special exhibition of ancient Chinese Buddhist paintings, lent by the temple Daitokiyi, of Kioto, Japan." Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1894. Mr. Fenollosa was good enough to show me this marvellous series of paintings before they were exhibited to the public, and I am happy to find this opportunity of thanking him for some of the fullest and most vivid hours that I have passed. Several of the best of the series were bought by my friend Mr. Denman W. Ross, to whose courtesy and kindness the reader should be grateful for the reproduction that is here offered.

and yet it is not so much for the subject—which is not comparable with that of Dürer's wood-cut—as for what the artist has made of it. Here we feel an ecstasy of devotion and vision, here we behold a transubstantiation of body into soul, whereof we rarely get as much as a vanishing glimpse in our own art. Beside this design the most religious achievements of a Dürer grow sterile or commonplace.

The whole cycle of Chinese pictures, of which this one forms part, conveys in no diminished degree a sense of things spiritual which we scarcely ever find expressed in our own art. And yet the themes they treat are singularly close to the themes of Christian, and particularly of Franciscan, legend. Their inspirations have much in common : for what can be more like in spirit than certain phases of Buddhism and certain phases of Franciscanism ?

But I cannot permit myself at the present moment to write of these Buddhist paintings, with all the thoughts they awake and all the ideas they suggest, further than to ask one question. Why is Christian art so unreligious, so unspiritual, as compared with the art of Buddhism ? Is it because we Europeans as individuals are much less spiritual, much less mystical, than Orientals ? Is

it because, as a race, we do not take spirit in very great earnest, regarding it merely as one attitude out of many that may be held towards the problems of life ; because instinctively we prefer ever-continued experimentation to any realisable perfection, to any attainable beatitude ? Or is something at fault with our imaginative faculty and our art ?

We certainly are less single in aim than Orientals, for which reason, perhaps, we never feel a purpose so deeply, and consequently do not devote ourselves so completely to its attainment. Even in the realm of imagination, we seldom give loose rein to feeling, for knowledge quickly jumps on as charioteer. Our art has a fatal tendency to become science, and we hardly possess a masterpiece which does not bear the marks of having been a battlefield for divided interests.

Then, I suspect that in our art there is an inherent incapacity for spiritual expression—not because of its faults alone, but no less because of its qualities. Its essential fault is an almost insurmountable tendency toward transcribing mere fact ; its essential quality is its constant endeavour to realise the material significance of objects, particularly of the human nude, its chief instrument of expression. Our art early discovered

that this most highly prized effect was to be reached more securely by modelling than by line. But modelling not only prefers the static to the mobile (wherefore our art ever strives toward the monumental and architectonic), but clogs movement even where it permits it. Our deservedly canonised art never allows us to forget our bodies, although it quickens them with heroic life.

But spirit, soul—how shall the sense of these be communicated? How indeed? At all events not by mere representation, not merely by upturned faces and pious looks. Few are the means which the arts of design, existing to enhance the visible, can employ to convey so much as a suggestion of the invisible world. One of the very few ways is space-composition as perfected among us by Perugino and Raphael. We shall not find many designs of a kind we should call religious which do not attain their effect by means of this art. Another way is to avoid *chiaroscuro* and modelling in the round, and to employ contours only; and by contours we of course do not mean mere outlines defining the shape, but outlines which have in themselves an energy and a vitality, that whether they are representative or caligraphic give off values of movement; and values of movement have the power to suggest the unembodied, life

unclogged by matter, something in brief that comes close to the utmost limits of what visual art can do to evoke spirit. A third and even better way is to combine the two, to put figures that suggest incorporeal life into effects of space that evoke the *au delà*, the infinite.

Among the reasons, therefore, to be given for the great superiority as religious expression of Buddhist to Christian art, we must place to the front the fact that Eastern design is almost exclusively an art of contours, of values of movement, and, in its own way, not ours, of space-composition. And if this be so, we are led to wonder whether of European schools of design that one which approached Oriental art closest in its means of expression would not be most successful in conveying a sense of the spiritual.

Of European schools of design none comes so close to those of the far east as the school of Siena during the fourteenth and earlier decades of the fifteenth centuries. And so mysteriously close is the tie between certain tendencies that one seldom finds them singly, but almost always together. Thus, Sienese design, when it reaches to the height of great art, not only tends to avoid modelling in the round and to procure its effects by pure line,

with values of movement alone ; tends not only, as follows upon pure line, to flat colours ; but—and this is not so easily explained—tends as well toward colour schemes similar to those in use in old Chinese and Japanese art. It happens also—who shall say to just what extent in consequence of these tendencies?—that the Sienese were the most emotional and the most mystically inclined of peoples, nurturing saints (and later, heretics) as commonly as others fostered statesmen, humanists, and men of science. What other town, in Italy at least, has such a calendar of native saints—two of whom are still invoked in every corner of the Catholic world : Catherine, who renewed in her person the profoundly significant miracle of the stigmata ; and Bernardine, who became not only the greatest revivalist of his time, but succeeded in bringing to life again the spirit and teaching of Francis ?

In Siena then, if anywhere, should we look for a painter who might give something like adequate expression to the Franciscan ideal. Had Ambrogio Lorenzetti's frescoes in the cloister of the Minorites come down to us, we might perhaps have found what we seek. He had the intensity of feeling, the spirituality of conception, and the power of design to have comprehended the Saints' aspira-

tions, and to have given them form. As it is, we have but Ghiberti's eloquent description and two badly preserved fragments, one of which, however, representing a scene similar to Giotto's Francis kneeling before the Pope, suffices to manifest the altogether more spiritual atmosphere which Ambrogio would have made us breathe. His precursor, the sublime Simone, his pupil, the great unknown master who painted the Pisan Triumph of Death, or his more distant follower, who in the porch at Lecceto has left frescoes of singularly convincing spirituality, might have given marvellous embodiments of certain aspects of Franciscan lore and doctrine. But neither they, nor any other Sienese of the trecento, has enriched us with works on these themes.¹ Yet if ever it was to be treated adequately, it would have to be at Siena.² There alone among great Italian cities, the Renaissance, which in its essence was a spring-tide of humanity,

¹ I now believe that the fragments of frescoes at S. Francesco are by Pietro, the elder but less-gifted brother of Ambrogio. Since this was first published, frescoes have reappeared in S. Francesco at Pienza. They are by Bartolo di Fredi, and to some extent anticipate Sassetta's treatment of the Franciscan legend.

² Of Florentine art in the fourteenth century we need not speak, for, had every other circumstance been favourable, no painter of that time possessed the energy to break with the Giottesque formula; and we need but glance at Ghirlandajo's frescoes at S. Trinita, or Benozzo's at Montefalco, the one so Philistine, the other so boyish, to be persuaded that quattrocento Florentine painting was not likely to do justice to the Little Poor Man of Assisi—unless, indeed, a Botticelli had come into the field. But when Sandro turned to mysticism it was under the influence of

quickenings every variety of personality to the expression of its innate impulses—there alone, the Renaissance took from the start the shape of a religious rather than of a humanistic or scientific movement. Not that humanism was excluded from Siena, any more than religion was banished from Florence, but it was subordinated to the dominant interest—religion. This was due to St. Catherine, and still more to St. Bernardine; and Bernardine being the restorer of the strict tenets of Francis, the early Renaissance in Siena may without exaggeration be called a Franciscan renaissance.

While Bernardine was evangelising the whole of Italy, but ever returning to his beloved Siena, where he not only preached more than elsewhere, but shed as well the measureless influence of a saintly presence, there grew to manhood beside him the greatest painter that Siena had between the noon and sunset of its art. Whether Stefano Sassetta was known to the saint we cannot ascertain, although the probabilities in its favour are overwhelming, seeing that he painted an altarpiece for the church, since known as the *Osservanza*, Savonarola, who had little in common with Francis. Nor need we say much of northern Italy. Only one of its painters might at a certain moment of his life have dealt adequately with the legend of Francis; but, so far as I am aware, Giovanni Bellini has left us nothing in which this saint appears in more than a merely incidental rôle.



ST. FRANCIS AND THE BEGGAR.
SASSETTA.

THE DREAM OF ST. FRANCIS.
Chalandon Collection, Paris.



ST. FRANCIS AND THE BEGGAR.

GIOTTO.

Anderson, Rome.

Assisi.



which was built for Bernardine on the site of the hermitage whither he had retired after his conversion. But his preaching, if not his familiar conversation, must have done much to form the mind and incline the heart of the painter to a singularly intimate perception of the seraphic spirit and doctrines. At all events, it is he, Stefano Sassetta, who has left us the most adequate rendering of the Franciscan soul that we possess in the entire range of painting.

This rendering is to be found in nine panels, once forming the front and back of a single altarpiece, but now scattered.¹ Let us look at them in the sequence of the events they portray.

The youthful saint, dismounted from his horse, gives his cloak to a poor knight, who looks on in an attitude of devout thankfulness. A road stretches inward between lawns planted with cypresses to a villa, beyond which pleasant hills close the horizon. A silvery, still sky soars over it, getting bluer as it climbs higher, and there we behold a visionary castle with banners of the cross floating from its battlements. Then as we let our eyes travel down again they soon encounter a

¹ The triptych forming the front is in the possession of the present writer. The eight panels of the back are all in France : one at Chantilly, six in Paris in the collection of M. Chalandon, and one in the Château Beaumont (Loir et Cher), belonging to the Count de Martel.

chamber in the very foreground, and therein, asleep, the same youthful saint. An angel on suspended wing bends over him impressively, pointing to the keep in the clouds. Considered merely as narrative, this story is told at least as clearly and dramatically as by Giotto, but far more succinctly. Giotto, by taking two frescoes to tell the same tale, fails to indicate that the inspiring dream was the consequence of the generous deed. Sassetta, moreover, gives a much more spiritual interpretation and more spiritual suggestiveness. Thus in Giotto's beggar we discover no sign of his poverty or his rank—for all we see he is an ordinary well-to-do person. Sassetta's, on the contrary, is bare-footed, in rags, and haggard, yet so dignified, so far from grasping, that he looks the worshipping admirer rather than the needy recipient of the chivalrous saint's charity. Then note how the two artists treat the dream; the Florentine builds you a firm palace which rises massively from its solid foundations, while the Sienese plunges you into a visionary world, with his keep in the clouds. Giotto is clearly at a disadvantage. He is, to begin with, not so poetically minded as Sassetta; but that is not all. His art is too static; his figures are too well realised as mass and not sufficiently well articulated. He is too much addicted to model-



DREAM OF ST. FRANCIS.

Anderson, Rome.

GIOTTO.

Assisi.



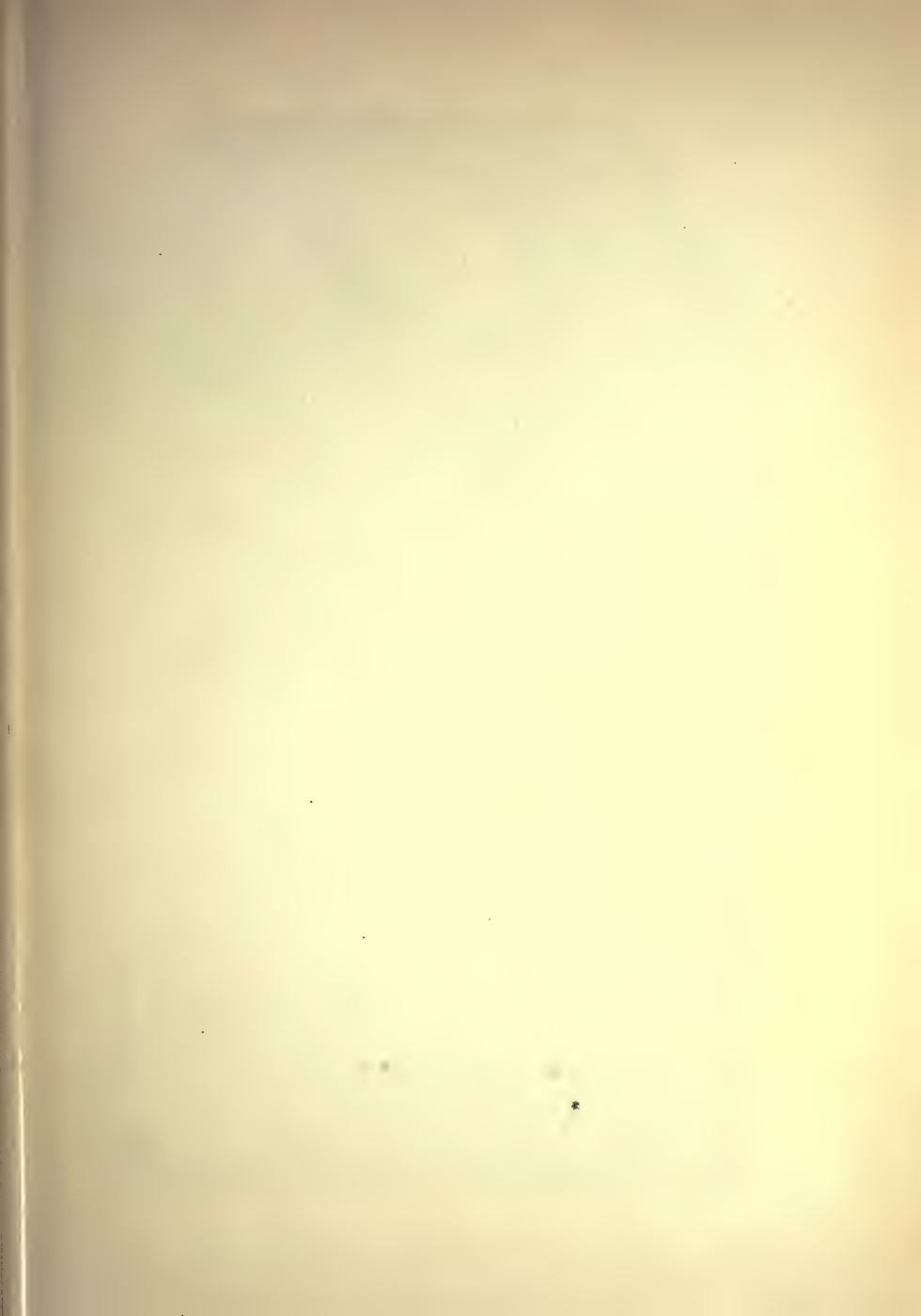
ling and not enough to line to produce the effect of a poetical as distinguished from an actual reality. For these reasons alone perhaps, his Francis has, with all his own fine qualities of interpretation, little of that glamour of chivalry—so much in the spirit of the seraphic youth—which the later painter conveys with his supple contours, eager movement, and silhouetted effect, almost as of a beautiful brass commemorating a young crusader dead long ago. Add that Giotto, like most European painters since his time, was unaware of the emotional and spiritual suggestiveness of space-composition, and you realise why his version of the story, taking place at the foot of a high hill, remains prose, while Sassetta's, with its soaring spaces of silvery sky, lightens, uplifts, and dematerialises you, wafting you into an ideal world.

Under a colonnade of slender pillars supporting a roofed-in terrace sits a mitred prelate on his curule chair, sheltering a naked youth with his mantle and pleading for him against a man whom his friend's strong arm can barely restrain from throwing himself upon the youth. At the elder man's feet lie the garments which the younger has evidently cast off, and this gives the key to the interpretation. It is a son casting away all that his father can claim as his, and putting himself under the protection of a priest, to the no

small rage of the father. The motive could not have been treated more dramatically, more eloquently, more essentially. At the same time the calmness of the one group and the violence of the other, the look of pitying tenderness in the son and of uncontrollable fury in the father, point the contrast between saintliness and worldliness ; while here again the swiftness of the line where the action is most vehement, the daintiness of the architecture and the limpid azure of the motionless sky, dematerialise—but do not devitalise—the scene. Giotto's fresco of the same subject is in many respects the finest of his series, yet I cannot say that it conveys the sense of the event at all so spiritually. Once more the faults are due in part to an inferiority of imagination, and in part to the qualities of his art. There are, for instance, too many mere spectators in the fresco at Assisi, and the bishop looks away unconcerned, while Francis is not the macerated person who has fought the great fight with the visible and invisible. He is the powerfully-built, firm-fleshed nude that classical European art has ever sought after as the surest means of conveying a convincing sense of solid form.

The next subject¹ is one of the most specifi-

¹ It belongs to the Count de Martel, of the Château de Beaumont, Cour-Cheverny, Loir et Cher. To this gentleman, as well as to M. Chalandon, I am greatly indebted for the photographs they have taken





ST. FRANCIS RENOUNCING HIS HERITAGE.

SASSETTA.

Chalandon Collection, Paris.



Anderson, Rome.

ST. FRANCIS RENOUNCING HIS HERITAGE.

GIOTTO

Assisi.





ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF OF GUBBIO.

SASSETTA.

Comte de Martel, Château de Beaumont.

cally Franciscan of the entire legend. It is the conversion of the wolf of Gubbio, a theme chosen by Sassetta for its possibilities of pictorial interpretation, or dictated to him by the neighbourhood of Gubbio to Borgo Sansepolcro, for which town he was painting this altarpiece; or perchance because the latter place regarded Frate Agnello as one of its citizens, and this Frate Agnello had originally been a notorious highwayman named Lupo, whose conversion by Francis may have furnished, as perhaps certain Sansepolcrans were aware, the historical basis for one of the most marvellously beautiful of the *Fioretti*. Sassetta has treated it in this way: By the town gate, between the battlements of which heads of women are seen looking down, we behold a crowd of burghers in the costume of the middle years of the fifteenth century, and St. Francis holding Brother Wolf's paw with his left hand and pointing with his right to the notary who sits by the gate, taking down word for word the agreement made between the saint and the ravening beast. The mauled body of a child is seen in the middle distance close to a pine wood under an arid rock rising into the sky. And this sky, with its circling

for me or given me permission to take. Unfortunately M. de Martel's picture has not come out well enough to give a good reproduction, but I have thought it of interest to reproduce it even from an inadequate and small photograph.

flight of birds, stretches high and clear over the scene down to the horizon, where just over the heads of the crowd appear the towers and palaces of a distant town. That Sassetta has succeeded in surpassing the exquisite pages of the *Fioretti* is more than I would claim. It is enough that he has told his story so clearly that we should know what was going on even if we had no acquaintance with the legend; enough, that to give us the sense of the saint's whole-hearted simplicity he represents the action as proceeding between himself, the wolf, and the notary;¹ enough, finally, that he dips it all in the fairy atmosphere of Umbrian skies.

St. Francis before the Soldan: Giotto has treated the episode twice, first at Assisi and many years later at S. Croce. His imagination was at once fixed by the possibilities of this subject for the presentation of heroic types and action—the types and action so dear to the classic artists of Europe. Both are matchlessly dramatic, commanding, all but superhuman. At S. Croce he outruns his times by nearly two centuries, and in the figure of the soldan he gives a superb instance of almost Michelangelesque *contrapposto*. But

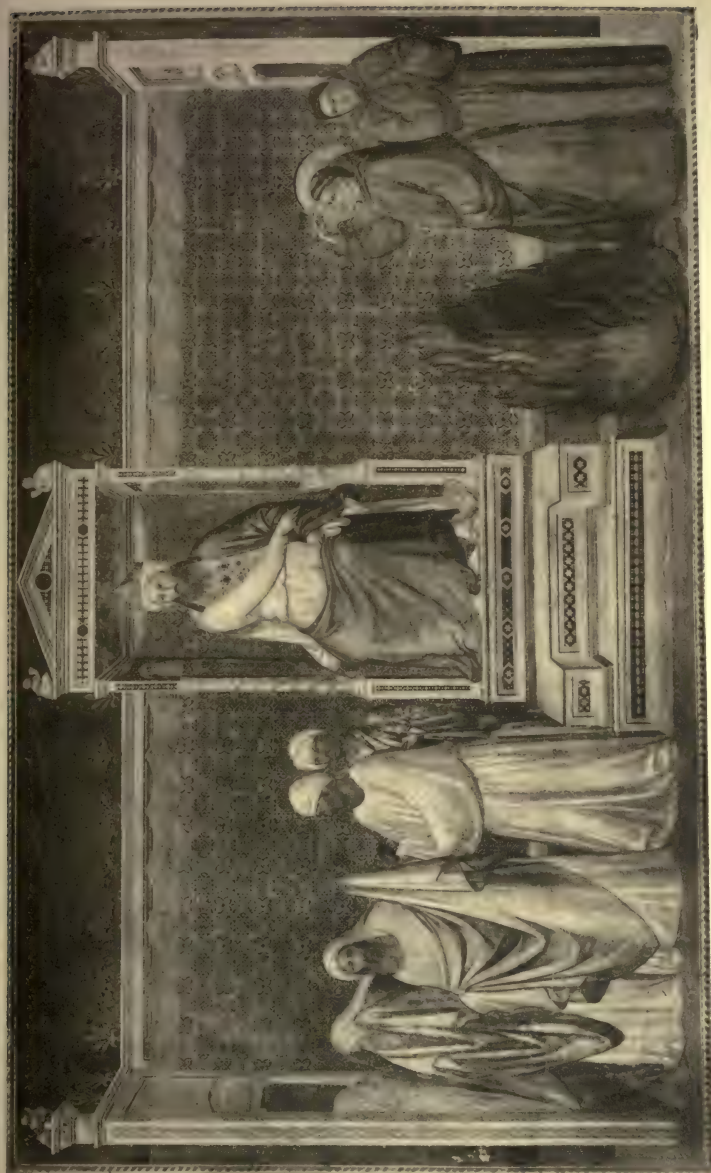
¹ M. Sabatier sees in this legend a sign of the saint's great humanity, which led him to bring under the law even that outlaw of outlaws, the wolf. Sassetta certainly confirms this view, for he represents the scene as a formal legal compact.



ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE SOLDAN.

SASSETTA.

Chalandon Collection, Paris.



ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE SOLDAN.

GIOTTO.

Anderson, Rome.

S. Croce, Florence.



there is something almost ignoble in the hesitating cowardice of the mollahs when challenged to pass through the fire, and in his heroic mood Giotto forgets that the part the soldan played in this story was not altogether manly. Sassetta did not forget, and his soldan is a perplexed creature nervously clutching his staff, dreading the saint's triumph no less perhaps than did the priests, for according to the legend he dared under no circumstance change his faith. Francis, however, does not parley, as in Giotto's frescoes, but plunges into the flames with a fervour no less glowing than they. It is too late for the paynim to retreat. They are held spellbound, and on their countenances there is painted more of awe than of cowardice; they also are almost converted. But the flames! They are neither merely symbolic, as in Giotto, nor realistic, as almost any painter of our day might make them; but the soul of fire—of fire, "beautiful and joyous, and most robust and strong," with all its swiftness of line—taking the shape of wondrous, lapping, leaping, changing curves, destined to transubstantiate all substance into spirit. And ever and always the "courteous" sky—to adopt another exquisite phrase of Francis—"shining upon the just and unjust alike," and through a narrow arch, a high glimpse of lovely hills in the serene distance.

The next subject, Francis before the Pope, was also treated twice by Giotto, both times much more dramatically, and at Assisi with even more feeling than Sassetta. Not that Sassetta has not produced an exquisite work of art with the jewel-like beauty and the sanctuary softness of light of interiors painted by the van Eycks and their followers ; but he has brought in too many almost indifferent bystanders, and the saint is nearly lost in the crowd. The Pope's expression and gesture, the way he takes hold of the as yet unstigmatised hand, go far, however, to redeem the artist's fault. And this fault, if it may not be excused, can be explained. Sassetta was too well acquainted with Lorenzetti's great fresco representing the youthful Louis of Toulouse received by Pope Boniface. Our painter could not emancipate himself from this composition—one scarcely finds the heart to reproach him—and he adopted it, with the usual consequences of such wholesale borrowing.

Among the crags of a mountain-top, a little below the summit, we find Francis kneeling on his right knee, his face ecstatic, his hands just stigmatised. In the heavens over the gem-like rocks, a radiant seraph in the shape of a "most beautiful man crucified" looks out of a glory of golden light straight at the saint. No bolts are



ST. FRANCIS BEFORE THE POPE.

SASSETTA.

Chalandon Collection, Paris.





ST. FRANCIS RECEIVING STIGMATA.

SASSETTA.

Chalandon Collection, Paris.

shot from the hands and feet of the one to those of the other, as Giotto and most other painters have imagined, some of them, like Benozzo at Montefalco, giving their representations of the event the character of a geometrical pattern. (The temptation to this must have been strong, for it was the natural way of making the miracle obvious to the vulgar.) But all the texts down to the *Fioretti* give a singularly spiritual account of the stigmatisation, saying, that "this vision was vouchsafed the saint that he might understand that not by bodily martyrdom, but by mental burning, was he to be changed into the exact likeness of Christ crucified." Indeed, it was believed by his three companions that Francis bore the stigmata inwardly from the day when the crucifix at S. Damiano spoke to him; and that Holy Cross day at La Verna, twenty years later, but marked the time when, after so many years of ecstatic meditation of the Passion, they began to appear to all men, bursting through the saint's body as a fig—to use Jacopone da Todi's homely phrase—bursts with too much sweetness. It is this spiritual aspect of the great miracle which Sassetta surely had in mind, and presents, although with some slight loss of dramatic force. He gives us, however, more of an atmosphere than any

other artist who ever treated this theme, more of the feeling of treading on holy ground, and of being in a place where it is meet that God and man should hold converse.

For reasons that will appear presently we pass over the next subject, The Marriage of Francis to Poverty, and proceed to the last, The Funeral of the Saint. At S. Croce, Giotto has made this the theme of a masterpiece. For clear yet rhythmic grouping it is a composition with few rivals, and the humanity of the event has not been forgotten. The gestures of grief go as far as seemliness permits, and indeed the kissing of the saint's hands and feet is perhaps a little over-realistic. It would scarcely be hypercritical to question whether the division of labour be not a little too carefully carried out, whether the priests be not too indifferent, for spiritual purposes at least, much as their pillar-like attitudes on both sides of the undulating group of mourners suit the arrangement. One thing, however, Giotto has nearly forgotten, and that is the real significance of this scene in Franciscan legend. It was not to commemorate the funeral of the founder, but a far more important event from the point of view of his order—no less an event than the confirmation of the truth of the stigmata. Jerome, a



FUNERAL OF ST. FRANCIS.

GIOTTO.

S. Croce, Florence



FUNERAL OF ST. FRANCIS.

SASSETTA.

Chalandon Collection, Paris.



knight of Assisi, doubted their existence, and at the saint's burial found the occasion to search his side, and feel the wound. Henceforth he not only believed, but proclaimed the truth of the miracle. Now Giotto has not clean forgotten this important event, but his Jerome, represented as kneeling with his back turned toward us, becomes insignificant, and fails to attract our attention. Sassetta, as usual, was at once too much imbued with genuine Minorite feeling, and too little of a classic artist, to think of sacrificing illustration to any formal ends. His grouping cannot stand beside Giotto's, although even as an arrangement it has its own great merits, based on the fact that the shape called for a vertical instead of an horizontal composition. But the real event is presented in its full significance: Jerome's action is the most prominent feature; and at the same time a definite atmosphere is conveyed—that atmosphere of a sanctuary during a sacred rite, in which the Sienese had been so successful since Simone Martini and Ambrogio Lorenzetti.¹

The seven panels we have hitherto examined treat of the legend of the seraphic saint. Far be it from me to claim for them that they have

¹ Who is the mysterious, shrouded figure in the foreground? Is it St. Clare, or is it possible that the painter knew of Jacoba di Settesoli?

extracted out of the events presented all their spiritual significance. A great Chinese master would have been more on a level with the high inspiration of the subject. My only claim for Sassetta is that he has dealt with these themes much more spiritually than any other European artist whom I can recall, Giotto included, conveying more of a definite atmosphere, and that atmosphere one of poetical, even religious evocation.

The two remaining panels attempt, like the Giottesque frescoes over the tomb of Francis, to give us the spirit of the saint's soul and teaching. We have seen how signally those followers of Giotto failed in this undertaking, if indeed we may assume that they were so much as aware of its purpose. They failed not only, as might be argued, because their teacher and inspirer was not very spiritually-minded, and because he was certainly out of sympathy with the Franciscan ideals, going so far as to indite mordant verses against their cardinal doctrine of voluntary poverty, but also because his artistic purpose, and the instruments of expression this purpose demanded, did not promote the direct communication of the sense of things spiritual. Giotto's art, as we have already seen, would not dematerialise the object of vision—quite the contrary—and for that reason,

possibly, never went very far into the realms of imaginative design.

"Imaginative design" is a phrase that may have all sorts of meanings, and to avoid misunderstanding I shall say in what sense it is used here. What I have in mind is the kind of design which, instead of expounding facts, no matter how exalted, makes a direct appeal to the imagination, communicating emotions, feelings, and atmospheres, and exhaling dreams, as fragrant odours are exhaled from sweet-smelling flowers. Paint the carnation or the rose, and lifelong habits of association evoke some faint breath of its perfume. Take a box containing the most evocative spices, and paint the box. The resulting picture will give you scarcely less than will the mere representation of the man whose quality is not in his physical appearance, but in his soul's attitude and in his longings. Our classic art is great in representing every visible aspect of man and his world, but there it stops. True, we Europeans have been eager enough to represent the inner soul, but we count few successes, for with the rarest exceptions our artists have laid themselves out to failure in at least two ways. They think of representing when they should think of presenting, and they remain fettered to modelling

and mass. where they should realise that the art of suggestion must depend chiefly upon contour, colour, space-effects, and movement. Imaginative design as compared with our ordinary art—an art whose highest ambition has significantly enough nearly always been “historical” painting—imaginative design is lyrical and even rhapsodical, and never narrates for the sake of narration. Not that it may not use events, as Pindar, for instance, uses them in his odes, but they must be employed only when they can serve as symbols of a higher purpose. In brief, there is nothing it may not do, provided it achieve its object of exhaling the atmosphere it wishes you to breathe.

Entertaining such ideas of the essence and scope of imaginative design, let us see how Sassetta dealt with the seraphic teaching and spirit. In place of the four subjects at Assisi he takes but two, and in these two it was his business to present the cardinal doctrine and the prevailing mood of St. Francis. Now, as we know, the saint laid stress on nothing so much as on the emancipation of the soul through the casting off of all that was not necessary to its happiness, its happiness consisting in a oneness of purpose and will with the Creator and Saviour. This is not a doctrine which is peculiar to Francis, nor even to Christianity.

What is peculiar to Francis (among Christians and Europeans at least) is the spirit in which he embraced the doctrine. It was no spirit of renunciation or abnegation. There was indeed nothing negative at the root of his teaching. Poverty, as he called this cardinal virtue, was to him the way to perfection, the uniter of the divided, the unifier of the universe; and with his troubadour knight-errant soul he sang of her as his beloved, his bride. Poverty was the romance of his life—how much more than Beatrice was of Dante's! His Lady Poverty grew neither abstract nor severe—for him to the end she remained the radiant love of his youth. This, then, was the state of soul towards a cardinal doctrine which Sassetta undertook to communicate to us—an undertaking, as we shall recall, in which Giotto and all his followers failed.

The legend recounts how one day, in the last year of his life, Francis was journeying with his physician on foot from Rieti to Siena. As they were drawing near the goal of their journey, in the plain between Campiglia and S. Quirico d'Orcia, he was encountered by three maiden forms in poor raiment, who saluted him with the words, "Welcome, Lady Poverty," and suddenly disappeared. St. Bonaventure comments as fol-

lows: "The brethren not irrationally concluded that this apparition imported some mystery pertaining to St. Francis, and that by the three poor maidens were signified Chastity, Obedience, and Poverty, the beauty and sum of evangelical perfection, all of which shone with equal and consummate lustre in the man of God, though he made his chief glory the privilege of poverty." Here then we have one of those rare events which are so manifestly symbolical that even ordinary minds cannot help grasping their poetical significance. The maidens salute him archly, as maidens have saluted many an enamoured knight, with the name of his mistress. The troubadour romantic nature of the saint's passion for Lady Poverty is thus referred to with such startling clearness that Giotto's follower, who surely was acquainted with this matutinally fresh apologue, must deliberately—although for all we know not of his own choice—have passed it over when painting his Marriage of Francis to Poverty. Yet here, if anywhere, was the theme for a great imaginative design. You may seek in vain through the golden books of seraphic lore for anything in the nature of an event comparable to this in the opportunities it offers the artist of presenting by means of action inherently sym-

bolical the life's attitude of its founder. The three virgin forms, the salutation, the disappearance—what more real and effective elements could a poetically gifted artist desire?

Stefano Sassetta, like all real poets, possessed the mythopœic faculty of developing legend to the point where it blossoms into flowers fragrant to the soul. Neither Thomas of Celano nor St. Bonaventure speaks of a mystic marriage taking place between Francis and Poverty on the occasion of his meeting with the three maidens, nor does any other writer with whom I happen to be acquainted. But Sassetta must have seen at once what this encounter lacked to give it completeness, and how self-evident and hence perfect an allegory it could thus become. Now this is what he made of it.

In the foreground of a spacious plain three maidens stand side by side. White is the robe of the first, greyish-brown of the second, rose red of the last. The one in brown is bare-footed and the most plainly clad, but it is on her hand that the ardent saint, with an eager bend of his body, bestows his ring. Then swiftly they take flight, and ere they disappear in the high heavens over the celestially pure horizon of Monte Amiata they display symbols which reveal them as Poverty,

Chastity, and Obedience. And when last we see them floating away in the pure ether, Lady Poverty looks back lovingly on Francis. No one who can appreciate the idyllic, tender, rapturous atmosphere of the *Fioretti* but must feel that here at last he breathes the same air. Perhaps no greater praise can be given to this exquisite panel than to regard it as an unwritten but painted page of the *Fioretti*.¹

Thus Sassetta succeeds where Giotto failed ; and he succeeded not only because his imagination was better able to penetrate the open secret of Franciscan doctrine, not only because he was more lyrical and rapturous, but also because his instruments of expression did not blunt, as Giotto's certainly would have, but enhanced his vision. Transform as you easily can these three slim, undulant, unsubstantial figures into the massive,

¹ One of the most beautiful pages of interpretation of a work of art that it has ever been my good fortune to read is M. F.-A. Gruyer's description of this picture in his *Peinture à Chantilly*. He errs, however, in discovering the valley of the Tiber, Assisi, and Mount Subasio, as well as the Portiuncula in its landscape. What he takes for this shrine was probably intended for the town-gate of S. Quirico ; what he believes to be Assisi is Campiglia, and his Subasio is Amiata. Who that has spent enchanted days looking out of Siena's gates and roaming over her territory but will recognise in Sassetta's horizons the familiar lines of the mountain which is ever present to one's eyes in southern Tuscany ? Besides, the scene of the event is clearly stated by Bonaventure, and it is knowing Italians but little to suppose a Sieneese painter capable of neglecting to add glory to his "own sweet nest" by transferring the scene to Umbria.

superbly realised, but heavy and unarticulated types of Giotto's; give the landscape less of a foreground, remove most of the sky, and with it the floating vision, and you still will have a more than adequate illustration to Bonaventure's legend, and a more poetical rendering of Franciscan story than any that the great Florentine has left us. But here the figures on the ground are nearly dematerialised, the figures in the air are wafted up with their long-stoled robes fluttering like flames, the horizon is ineffably pure, and the high reaches of sky cast their transfiguring influence upon the mystery. These various instruments play upon the gentle heart, attuning it to much of all the harmony, all the "perfect blitheness" that Francis felt when he thought of his Lady Poverty.

In his attempt to communicate the essence of the relationship of Francis to his radical doctrine of Poverty, Sassetta was, as we have just seen, greatly assisted by the foundation of legend upon which he could build. But for the last painting of this series, intended to convey some sense of the saint's being, and of his soul's quality, he found no such assistance in a quasi-historical event needing but poetical transubstantiation to become the self-revealing symbol of a higher life. Nor

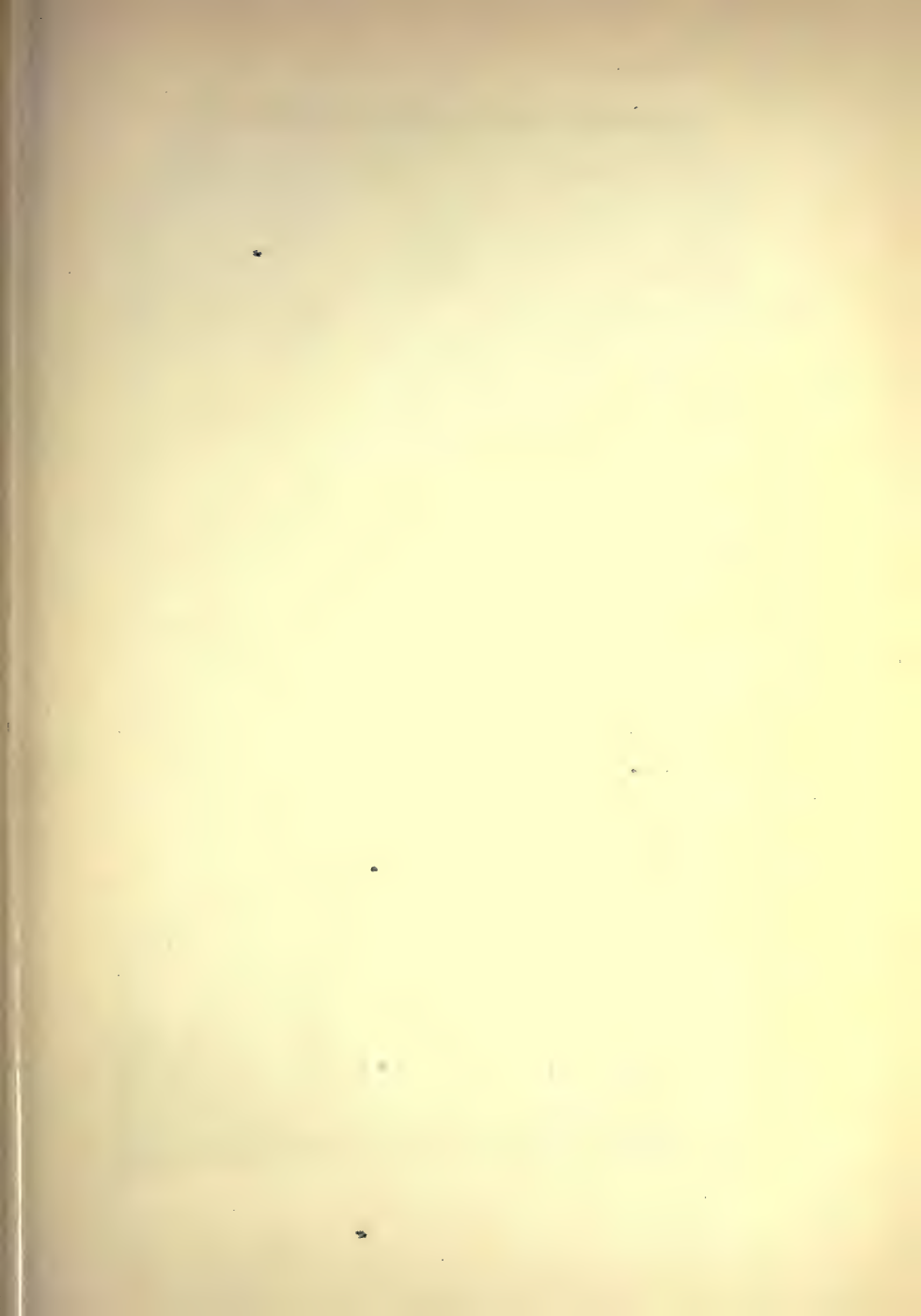
can it be said that he found much help in the works of his predecessors. How near the Giottesque art came to depicting the seraphic being we have already seen when examining the fresco over the tomb, representing the saint enthroned and reduced to a stolid object of worship. A distant follower, said to be Antonio Vite, treats the same subject at Pistoja, and certainly presents a less grim St. Francis, and more lyric if less robust angels ; yet, here also the saint remains an idol, although he partakes somewhat less of the Black Virgin, and kindred stocks and stones which from remote pre-historic times down to our own days have been objects of worship. But while anything may become an object of worship—what thing has not been and is not still worshipped somewhere on the earth's rind?—few things indeed are capable of conveying the atmosphere of worship, the sense of oneness with the universe, of ecstatic harmony with its purpose.

While it would be interesting to discuss at this point what means the art of painting has of conveying this mystic feeling, I must here limit myself to saying that the instruments at the disposal of European art for this object are nearly confined to one, and that one—space-composition—little understood and seldom employed by our

artists. But the East has all the treasures of imaginative design, and Sassetta with the quasi-oriental qualities of a Sienese has left us such a design, which, as a bearer of the true Franciscan perfume of soul, has no rival.

Over the sea and the land, into the golden heavens towers the figure of the blessed Francis, his face transfigured with ecstasy, his arms held out in his favourite attitude of the cross, his feet firmly planted on a prostrate warrior, in golden panoply. Cherubim and seraphim with fiery wings and deep crescent halos form behind the saint a nimbus enframing a glory of gold and azure, as dazzling as the sky, and as radiant as the sun. Overhead, on opalescent cloudlets, float Poverty in her patched dress, looking up with grateful devotion, Obedience in her rose-red robe with a yoke about her neck and her hands crossed on her breast, and Chastity in white, holding a lily. Underfoot, beside the crowned knight in armour, obviously symbolising Violence, we see corresponding to Poverty a nun in black holding a press and money-bag, with a watch-dog by her side, as obviously representative of Avarice; and corresponding to Chastity, a pretty woman in purplish rose colour, luxuriously reclining against a black pig, and gazing into a mirror—clearly the

Flesh. The almost childlike simplicity of the arrangement, the crimson and gold and azure, the ecstatic figure of the saint, the girlish figures of the radical Franciscan virtues, the more material figures of the vices, the flaming empyrean, the silvery green sea growing lighter as it approaches the silvery grey land, combine to present a real theophany, the apotheosis of a human soul that has attained to complete harmony with the soul of the universe by overcoming all that is belittling and confining, and opening itself out to all the benign influences of the spirit. The real meaning of the seraphic existence is surely conveyed here more clearly, more persuasively, more penetratingly than by all the Giottesque allegories at Assisi, not to speak of the one representing the "Gloriosus Franciscus," the inscribed title on the Triumph of Francis. Sassetta also, by the way, has placed an inscription in the resplendent halo behind the saint's head, but significantly different. It is PATRIARCHA PAVPERVM FRANCISCVS. There is but one picture in European art which approaches this panel in its suggestions of an ecstatic harmony with the Spirit of all things. It is Raphael's Transfiguration. I refer of course to the upper part only. And yet how inferior is that, owing to its being less simply, less flatly





GLORY OF St. FRANCIS.

SASSETTA.



Florence, Mr. Berenson.

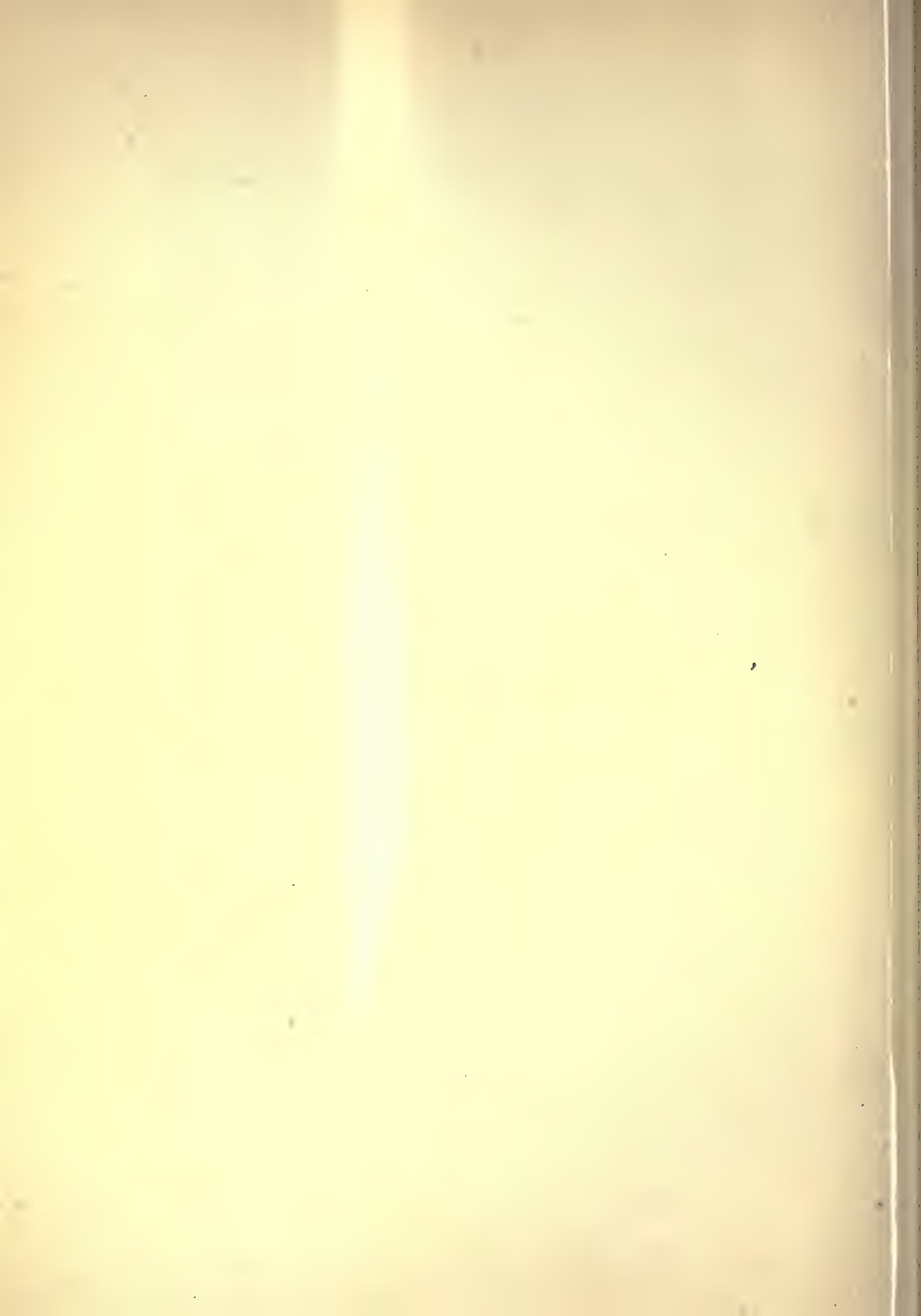


GLORY OF ST. FRANCIS.

Alinari.

TADDEO DI BARTOLO.

Perugia.



designed, owing to its relatively greater realism both in the figures and the landscape. Here, on the contrary, the figures are just sufficiently indicated to suggest neither ignorance nor slovenliness, but so little insisted upon for their mass, that they convey no sense of matter, but of the dematerialised; and everything is translated almost as it would be by the great eastern artists into values of movement, and into pure decoration. Note the wavelets of the sea, which are like so many smiles upon its silvery surface. Then, would you see what space-composition counts for in this design, compare it with a picture representing the same subject by our artist's older contemporary, Taddeo di Bartoli. That also represents St. Francis in a glory of cherubim, with the vices underfoot. But, leaving aside all other reasons for its relative failure, there is in Taddeo's panel no out-of-doors, none of that great suggestiveness of supernal harmonies which is furnished by Sassetta's sea and land and sky—the great cloister which his Lady Poverty brought as dower to her faithful knight.



PART II



PART II

IF we knew nothing about the author of the series of paintings for the great altarpiece of S. Francesco at Borgo Sansepolcro except what they themselves reveal, we should yet know more than a little, not only concerning his quality as an artist, but about his origin, his time, and his place as well. We happen, however, to possess other works of his, and some documentary information¹ regarding his activity as a painter.

From his birth at Siena on the last day of 1392, thirty-five years pass before we hear of Sassetta again. Then he makes a drawing of the font for S. Giovanni, leaving the colouring thereof to Sano di Pietro, his better known pupil and follower.

¹ In G. Milanese's *Documenti per la Storia dell'Arte Senese*, 1854, and in Borghesi and Banchi's supplementary volume to the above.

² This does not mean that Sassetta had anything whatever to do with the design of the font as it was finally executed. The documents in the four volumes mentioned in the last note, and the comments on them in Cornelius' *Jacopo della Quercia* (Halle, 1896, p. 36 *et seq.*), as well as in Lusini's *S. Giovanni di Siena* (Florence, 1901), leave no possible doubt that the basin as well as the tabernacle of the font were designed by Quercia and his assistants. Sassetta's drawing could have been no more than a copy of the model already existing. (Cf. "A Forgotten Painter," by Langton Douglas, *The Burlington Magazine*, No. III., p. 300).

What he did before that date is as yet obscure. In the works that can with certainty be ascribed to him there is no striking change of manner ; and this causes one to infer that they all belong to his full maturity. I have in mind, however, a number of paintings which further study may lead me to believe his, and in that case they will serve as so many links with his past ; but for the moment we shall take no account of these, and the more readily as Sassetta's derivation is, as we shall see presently, clear enough without them.

His earliest dated work is the altarpiece painted in 1436 for the Osservanza, St. Bernardine's own church. The Madonna sits on a throne with gorgeous hangings, the Child standing on her knee ; in the panel to the right stands Jerome in his cardinal's robes, in the panel to the left Ambrose, in his episcopal vestments ; in the gables of the panels are the busts of Peter, Christ, and Paul ; and in two roundels between the gables, the Virgin sits in an attitude of graceful deprecation, and Gabriel devoutly kneeling brings his Annunciation. The colouring is delicate, with the delicacy of the wind-flower, pure, transparent. The working of the gold ground, the merely ornamental parts, and the still severely gothic frame partake of the finest traditions of Sienese craftsmanship. The Madonna



SASSETTA.

TRIPTYCH.

Osservanza, Siena.

as a silhouette harks back to Simone Martini, but there is a premonition of Botticellian pathos in her expression. The saints are dignified, grand old men, far more intellectually conceived than similar figures were by Sassetta's older contemporary, Gentile da Fabriano, or by that master's followers, Pisanello, Jacopo Bellini, and Antonio Vivarini, all of whom were in nearly the same stage of the evolution of vision and form as our artist. Indeed the Ambrose in this Osservanza altarpiece, although not claiming the structural qualities, reminds one with singular vividness of the S. Prosdocimo in Mantegna's Brera polyptych, painted nearly twenty years later.

[Next in date comes the series of paintings which has been the theme of this article. On September 5, 1437, Sassetta undertook to execute for the high altar of S. Francesco at Borgo Sansepolcro, a polyptych, front and back, the separate panels of which were already fashioned, and prepared with gypsum for painting. He promised "to paint it with fine gold, ultramarine, and other good colours, and to employ all the subtleties of his art, and to make it as beautiful as he could," and to have it ready in four years. It was seven, and not four years, however, that he took to fulfil his promise, but then it was to the letter, as the

existing panels still witness. The documents unfortunately indicate none of the subjects to be represented, and, as the altarpiece was removed from its place in 1752, and its parts dispersed,¹ we should have no certainty that the series of Franciscan legends which we have studied once formed the polyptych of Borgo Sansepolcro, if Rossini in his valuable and still far from obsolete "Storia" did not reproduce as plate L of his atlas the central panel—the Triumph of St. Francis—which then showed, on the base of the frame, the following inscription, since obliterated: CRISTOFORUS FRANCISCI SR. FEI E ANDREAS IOHANNIS TANIS OPERARIUS. A. MCCCCXXXIII. These are, as it happens, the names of the churchwardens mentioned both in the contract of 1437 and in the settlement of 1444 as the persons delegated to deal with the artist, and the date, as we know, is the date of the completion of the work. It consisted, so far as I can tell, of a triptych with the Triumph of Francis represented on the central panel, St. John the Baptist on the right and the B. Raineri Rasini on the left wing. On the back were arranged the eight panels with which we are already acquainted, in the order that I have described them, except that the Mystic

¹ See Lorenzo Coleschi's "Storia della Città di Sansepolcro," 1886, p. 169.

Marriage preceded and did not follow the Funeral of Francis. There can be no reasonable doubt that all these formed a whole. Apart from all considerations resulting from unity of subject and treatment, we have the fact that the small panels are framed in the same way, with the identical raised floral pattern, and that if we allow for connecting members they are exactly of a size, measuring each 95 by 58 centimetres, to go on the back of the triptych, the central panel of which is 190 cm. by 122 cm. and the side panels 95 cm. by 58 cm. each. Perhaps there were paintings in the predella, with subjects not unlikely chosen from the legend of Raineri; perhaps also there were pinnacles and culminations, but of these there is no trace. Excepting the two life-size figures on the wings—which have never been separated from the central panel—we are already sufficiently acquainted with these paintings, at least in their more general and spiritual aspects. But these two figures will bear a word of description. Both are on gold ground, and stand on coloured marble platforms. The Baptist is a tall, emaciated but firm figure, with face of wild enthusiasm and great eloquence. He wears a skin and a long rose-pink mantle draped over his arms, and he carries a slender blue cross.

Raineri is a more monkish figure, with short grey hair, and grey habit, and a face resembling the saint's companion in the Mystic Marriage. In his hand he holds a small hoop around which are placed circlets edgewise.¹

It is now time we glanced at this polyptych from a more formal, more specific point of view. I need not insist on the design, the line, the movement, and the landscape, for we have taken sufficient account of these already. The colour, where it has not darkened, or rubbed off, is singularly pure, deep, and transparent. The quasi-mechanical stamping and ornamentation, and the materials employed, alone suffice to make these panels objects of visual pleasure. The drawing is no less pure and delicate than the colouring, and masterly enough not only to suffice for all the exquisite action contained in this series, but to command considerable qualities of structure. In certain ways Sassetta may be compared with Botticelli. Sandro could model as few, yet he frequently forewent high realisation of corporeal substance, deliberately preferring to translate tactile values into values of movement. Stefano was not

¹ I have thus far got no clue to the meaning of this symbol, except that I am informed that a figure holding a similar object may be seen in the choir of S. Francesco at Pistoja. It is, by the way, an inference only that this figure represents Raineri. It is based, however, on the fact that the polyptych was painted for an altar erected over his tomb.

a Sandro—I will not be so treacherous a friend as to claim it for him—but in essentials they had a surprising likeness to one another, and Sassetta could, when he chose, model in a way that few of his exact contemporaries out of Florence surpassed. Thus, in the central panel Francis is by no means non-existent under his habit, and stands firmly on his feet, and the figure of Lust is exquisitely moulded. So in the Mystic Marriage the floating virtues are at least adequately realised under their chastely simple robes, and the arms have their full weight. Perhaps there is no other Tuscan contemporary of whose quality and degree of accomplishment Sassetta reminds us so much as Masolino. But he is far in advance of him in perspective and landscape. Compare the Francis and the Poor Knight of the one, with the other's fresco at Castiglione d'Olona, representing the Feast of Herod. How exaggerated is the perspective, how archaic still is the landscape of the latter as compared with the former, wherein the perspective is almost ours, and the landscape, far from suggesting unsuccessful effort, is an ineffable dream of hypæthral beauty. Or think of the landscape in the Mystic Marriage; neither Masolino, nor any other Florentine for a long time to come, could produce such a sublime effect of

space. In one point, however, Sassetta lags behind. Masaccio in his S. Maria Novella fresco and in his Berlin birth-plate, and other Florentines after him, had already introduced into their paintings the noblest forms of Renaissance construction. Stefano retains gothic architecture, although he studiously avoids the pointed arch. On the other hand he attains, in his Francis before the Pope, to effects of an interior that no Florentine of even later date surpassed. Nor can Sassetta be regarded as backward in his power of individualisation. I am acquainted with no portrait from his hand, and this is not surprising, considering how few have come down to us from the first half of the fifteenth century; but in these panels we discover at least one face so individualised, so unlike any conventional type, that we need not hesitate to declare it a faithful likeness. It is the face that we see on the extreme left in Francis renouncing his Heritage, and again on the left in the Funeral. Still less was Sassetta insensible to the prevailing taste for such bravery of dress as is worn by the young gallants in the Francis before the Pope, or by the women in his Asciano picture, of which more presently. And the current interest in *genre* did not leave him unaffected. Turn once more to Francis renouncing his Heritage, and note in the

middle distance the sleek priest indifferently reading his breviary.

Thus, even without documents, we should know that this Borgo Sansepolcro polyptych was painted by a contemporary of Masolino, Pisanello, Jacopo Bellini and Antonio Vivarini. And that the master was a Sienese we should know not only from his pure, flat colour and his devotion to line, but in other ways as well. The panel representing Francis before the pope we saw, when examining it some time ago, to be something of a failure, and we discovered the reason in its being too close an adaptation of a work by Lorenzetti. Another reminiscence of the same great master and the same work is to be discerned in the attempted fidelity to oriental dress in the Francis before the Soldan. In the Funeral, on the other hand, the grouping reminds one of Simone Martini's frescoes at Assisi representing the death and burial of St. Martin, while the treatment of the interior recalls, as I believe we have already noted, Ambrogio and his Mass of St. Nicholas in the Florence academy. Finally, the Francis in Ecstasy of our artist, has, although no spiritual, a definite formal resemblance, as indeed we already have observed, to the seraphic saint in Taddeo di Bartolo's polyptych at Perugia.]

There is no difficulty in bringing Sassetta's origin closer home. In the cathedral of Asciano there is a polyptych by our painter,¹ in every way less mature than the Sansepolcro altarpiece, or even the Osservanza triptych. It is in all probability earlier than 1436—the date of the last-named work, and may even have been painted before 1430. At all events, it is Stefano's earliest important undertaking that has come down to us, and is therefore more than his later paintings likely to reveal his immediate derivation. But for a moment let us put this question out of mind, and examine the Asciano altarpiece for its own sake. It is a triptych representing the birth of the Blessed Virgin. But for its greater sense of beauty, greater dignity of pose, greater suavity of expression, and greater gorgeousness and flatness of colour, the subject is treated as it might have been by a Rogier or a Memlinc. It is a domestic scene carried out with that sense of every little action and every little circumstance having an almost sacramental value, the indispensable precision of ritual, which sense it is the sole business of justifiable *genre* painting to communicate. Ennobled comfort, cheerfulness, daintiness are the soul's perfumes exhaled from such a treatment of the subject.

¹ First ascribed to him by Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle.



SASSETTA.

POLYPTYCH.

Alinari.

Asciano.



You hear the pleasant crackle of the fire on the hearth, and yet you breathe the sun-enlivened air of the out-of-doors ; you get a charming glimpse of a little garden with its wall, its flower-beds and its solitary tree. At the time when this masterpiece of *genre* was painted it could have had but few rivals in European art.

No student of Sienese painting can fail to discover considerable schematic resemblance between this work and the one in the Opera del Duomo by Pietro Lorenzetti treating the same subject. Such an observation, however, would not advance us, for we have ample evidence already to Sassetta's descent from the Lorenzetti. We are seeking for more precise connections, and we find a clue at least in yet another Birth of the Blessed Virgin. This one is by Paolo di Giovanni Fei. It is in the Siena academy (photo, Lombardi, 800), and like both the others is arranged as a triptych ; furthermore, it is in conception and grouping half-way between them, having much less of the epic feeling of Pietro, and much more of the *genre* spirit of Stefano ; much more, like his, the treatment of a beautiful interior with sunny suggestions of the out-of-doors. Coming to details, we note a remarkable resemblance between the Anne in Fei's and in Sassetta's work, between the women holding

the child in both, and between the attendant who holds the napkin in both. The children are obviously alike—and, indeed, we may anticipate and say at once that all of Sassetta's children more or less resemble this one, derived from Fei, who in turn got his from Bartolo di Fredi. Minuter resemblances may be discovered, as, for instance, between the young woman sitting in the foreground on the right in Sassetta's triptych, and the St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Fei's, both having the almost identical shape and action of right hand.

The clue thus offered, namely, that there seems to have been a close relation between Fei and Sassetta, may be followed somewhat further. The Asciano triptych is crowned with three scenes representing the Madonna between angels, her death, and her funeral, charming paintings, of which, however, nothing more need be said here than that they enable us to assume that certain other panels by Stefano are of even earlier date. These are a Last Supper and the Four Patron Martyrs of Siena, in the academy of that town, originally, no doubt, both accessories of the same altarpiece. In all the figures of these little pictures, the ears are set aslant far back on the head, and this is a trait very peculiar to Fei, as any one who



PLATE No. XXIV.



POLYPTYCH.

SASSETTA.

takes the trouble to examine his works¹ will note. In the folds of the draperies also, particularly of the Supper, there are many resemblances to Fei's, to those especially in the triptych at Naples.

Those whom many years of concentrated study of art and artists have taught to note the curious way in which certain early traits will suddenly reappear in later life, will not be surprised to find such traits coming out in Sassetta's Cortona polypptych.² It certainly is a work of his full-blown prime, not earlier than 1436, the date of the Osservanza picture, but not much later. Nevertheless, in this painting of about 1437 he not only harks back to Fei, but further back still, to Fei's masters. Thus, the Child is almost Bartolo's, and the silhouetting of the Madonna's and of Margaret's

¹ Besides those correctly ascribed to him, the following are among the most interesting. In the Compagnia di S. Bernardino, by the Porta Camollia, a polyptych. At S. Domenico, a Madonna. In the Saraceni collection, an exquisitely wrought panel with the Madonna, saints and angels, and Eve in the foreground. At Naples, in the Minutuli chapel of the cathedral, a triptych, representing the Crucifixion and saints. (This beautiful work, which dates from no later than 1412, has hitherto passed under Giotto's and other names, but was recently identified as Fei's by that subtle connoisseur of Sienese art, Mr. F. Mason Perkins). In the Louvre, a Madonna and saints, No. 1314, a small early work. All of these paintings betray an artist who was taught by Bartolo di Fredi and Andrea Vanni while they were partners, and then leaned more and more to the latter. Indeed, the presence of a work at Naples, where it has been since 1412 at least, may be considered as pointing to a close relation between Fei and Vanni, who spent many years in the south. A list of Fei's works will be found in the second edition of my "Central Italian Painters."

² First correctly ascribed by Messrs. Crowe and Cavalcaselle.

figures vividly recalls Vanni, as for instance in the Virgin of his Annunciation at S. Pietro Ovile. A more trivial but by no means insignificant point is the nose, which in this Cortona work is rather horizontally tipped, as in most of Fei's faces. We may now safely consider the genealogy of Sassetta as established. He descends through Fei from Bartolo di Fredi and Andrea Vanni, who in turn took up art where Lippo Memmi left it.

It is time to glance at the more interesting of Stefano's remaining works. And first a few words more about the Cortona altarpiece. The central panel, containing the Madonna seated on a low bench covered with a yellow cloth, with two music-making angels at her feet, is largely and simply designed and beautifully wrought and coloured. The four saints are perhaps less interesting; yet the Margaret is a stately vision, and the Michael is that over-panoplied but invincibly youthful form, who, haunting Sieneese painting for nearly a century, makes here almost his first appearance. But, all in all, this is not a work which would attract one to Sassetta if one did not know him already.

The angels in the Cortona picture recall a panel in the writer's possession which deserves mention here. The Virgin is seen behind a parapet on which she supports the Child. One of her

hands touches His shoulder, while the other holds a pomegranate. Two angels rest their arms on the ledge, and two others, in long robes, rise high above. Unfortunately no reproduction gives an adequate idea of this work, partly because much of its beauty depends on its colour. The tender devoutness of the angels does not suffice, in the mere black and white, to overcome the bad construction of the Madonna's head and the too primitive drawing of the child. But the rose mauve of the Virgin's dress, as well as of the lower angels, the pale blue of her mantle, the very dark greenish blue of the upper angels' robes, sewn with golden crosses, the fiery red and gold of their wings, the crimson diadems, the yellow hair, combined with the design, not only produce an effect of hieratic gorgeousness, but at the same time exhale a subtle perfume of pre-Raphaelitism—I mean something of that perfume which Rossetti conveys both in his verse and in his painting.

A large altarpiece at Chiusdino, the little town on the crest of the high hill overlooking the famous ruin of S. Galgano, has the faults and the qualities of the less ambitious work last described. The Madonna is imposing, grandly noble, but the Child is as lumpy as in my picture, while the by-standing saints are not all of the most refined

beauty. But the olive-crowned angels, the splendid brocades worked with a pattern of peacocks' feathers, and the depth of expression, produce an effect of high solemnity and beauty, and almost efface the sense of squalour arising from the piteous condition of this work at present. Indeed the seven predelle are so incrustated with dirt that the subject of only one of them can now be deciphered. It is the Founding of St. Mary Major, and it invites comparison with Masolino's panel at Naples, Sassetta thus once more recalling his "spiritual kin" at Florence.¹

We must now take rapid note of a number of less important panels, dating from various periods, and then pass on to our painter's last undertaking,

¹ It is signed *Stefanus de Senis . . . pinxit*. The Madonna is crowned by two angels who appear over the throne, and on each side stands an angel, olive-wreathed. On the right St. Paul stands and St. Francis kneels; on the left Peter and the Baptist, to balance them. In the spandrels are eight small figures painted on a starred ground of gold and red. The condition of the entire work is wretched. Some of the predelle, which were painted, like most Sienese pictures between 1330 and 1450, on prepared linen affixed to a gesso ground, are now dropping in rags. This altarpiece offers an instance of the not uncommon neglect in which works of art in Italy—outside the Milanese—are apt to be left, so long as there is no danger that foreigners who love art for its beauty and not for patriotic reasons will carry them whither neither contemptuous indifference nor sham solicitude will torture them again. I was put on the track of this work by the *Inventario Generale degli Oggetti d'Arte della Provincia di Siena*, compiled by F. Brogi in 1863-1865, but brought out in 1897. It is one of the most valuable publications that have ever appeared in Italy upon Italian art. It has led me on innumerable expeditions, and, except in the rare cases where the works of art described have disappeared, it has never disappointed me. Such inventories were made at about the same time all over Italy. What has become of them? Except this one of Siena, the only other known to me is the inventory drawn up by Morelli and Cavalcaselle of pictures in the Marches and parts of Umbria.

the fresco on the Porta Romana. Bare mention will have to suffice for such slight things as the four relatively early small figures of SS. Jerome, Gregory, Louis, and Augustine, in the Sienese academy; the small Pietà at Dijon, identified and communicated to me by Mr. Roger Fry; the small Biccherna tablet in the Sienese archives, dated 1440, and representing (according to Mr. Heywood) St. Peter Alessandrini, who sits between two lily-like angels (photo, Lombardi); the two panels belonging to Lady Horner, of Mells Park, Frome, containing figures of SS. Dorothy, Catherine and James in one, SS. Christopher, Paul and Antony Abbot in the other, which I find in my notebook of July 1897 set down to our painter; the small triptych in the Saraceni collection at Siena, representing the Madonna seated between four angels, the Eternal above, the Baptist and the Virgin on the right, and Catherine of Siena (repainted) and Gabriel on the left wing (photo, Lombardi); or the small triptych in the Sienese academy (No. 177), which is almost a repetition of the last. Of greater interest are three bits of the same predella recounting episodes of poor St. Antony's temptations. One of them is at Siena (No. 166), and the other two—for acquaintance with which I am indebted to Mr. W. Rankin

—are in the Jarves collection at New Haven, U.S.A. Curious in these is the figure of the saint, painted in Sassetta's maturity, yet still reminiscent of Fei and Vanni; but charming and poetical are the landscapes: intimate, delicate, with crystalline skies full of circling birds. Three pictures remain, however, which deserve a somewhat less hasty glance. The earliest is a small Epiphany, part of a predella, no doubt, in the Saraceni collection (photo, Lombardi). In spirit it is already in advance of Gentile da Fabriano, and anticipates the delight in graceful adolescence which some years later was to constitute the charm of much of Pesellino's work. The drawing is still undecided, but the colouring is jewel-like. Sassetta is here almost in the stage where we found him in his Asciano polyptych. Until some years ago this little Adoration was ascribed to Fra Angelico, but this implies neither a compliment to its quality nor a sense of its artistic origin; it means simply that of the dozen or so of names which eighteenth-century connoisseurs were in the habit of applying to pre-Raphaelite art, Fra Angelico's seemed, as indeed it was, the most suitable.¹ The other two pictures are from Stefano's

¹ The woman on the extreme right here is singularly like one in corresponding position in a predella at Prato representing the Circum-



ADORATION OF MAGI.

SASSETTA.

Saraceni Collection, Siena.

last years. One is a large Madonna in the Siena academy (No. 325), so darkened and so badly hung that, but for Mr. Perkins, it would have escaped my attention. It is a majestic design, and proper cleaning would bring to light a noble work.¹ The other at Berlin (No. 63^B, photo by Hanfstängl) is almost the same design, but nearly on the scale of a miniature, and with a gracility and a delicacy becoming the diminutive size.

Sassetta's last ambitious work was to have been a fresco over the Porta Romana, representing the Coronation of the Virgin. Three years after he undertook it he died, some time in 1450, leaving the work unfinished. It was completed more than fifteen years later by Sano di Pietro. The instructed eye has no difficulty in distinguishing the two hands in this fresco, despite its ruined state. Sassetta painted the angels and saints in the canopy, and but three or four heads on the very top of the Coronation proper; for his heads, closely as they were copied by Sano, yet have a different, nobler air, rest on more slender necks, and show an alto-

cision. I mention it as an obvious case of purely fortuitous resemblance. The Prato panel, ascribed to Fra Filippo, but probably by Fra Diamante, was scarcely painted before 1455 at the earliest, while Sassetta's can be of no later date than 1435.

¹ It is said to come from the town hall, and may possibly be the picture painted at the end of 1446 for one of the public offices. See Milanese, *Documenti*, ii. p. 245.

gether greater elegance. And this testimony of one's eyes is confirmed by documents, for in the application made on April 12, 1451, by Stefano's widow for payment, she says that besides preparing the ground for the Coronation, and making most of the drawings, her husband had finished *tutta la volta*, i.e. the interior of the canopy.¹

And now a few brief words regarding Sassetta's following and influence.² Of his enrolled pupils, such as Sano di Pietro and Pellegrino di Mariano Rossini,³ we need say nothing, for they never

¹ Since this was first published, an Assumption of the Virgin has been exhibited at the Berlin Gallery (No. 1122) which Sassetta must have been working on when he died. As the reproduction will show, it must have been laid in by our master, and the Madonna's head and the host of the blessed above her painted by himself. The remaining figures were finished by some close follower, while the landscape is of quite later design. This imposing work is the earliest of those Assumptions which with Vecchietta's and Matteo di Giovanni's occupy so distinctive a position in the Sienese art of the Quattrocento.

² The following are pictures executed in Sassetta's workshop :

Siena, academy, No. 158, Madonna between Catherine and the Baptist ; No. 185, Madonna.

Asciano, Compagnia di S. Croce, St. Sebastian.

I do not flatter myself that I have mentioned all the Sassetas in existence ; but, following my custom, I speak of those only which I have seen with my own eyes, except in the rare cases where the contrary is specified. In the second edition of my "Central Italian Painters" will be found a list of all Sassetta's works known to me at present (1909).

³ He must have been the pupil of Sassetta in the first place, and not of Sano. Indeed, I suspect that his predella in the Sienese academy representing the Crucifixion, St. Jerome in the Desert, and St. Ambrose expelling the Arians, seeing that it is of the same width and refers to the same personages, may have formed part of Stefano's Osservanza altarpiece. His other predella in the same gallery, representing two scenes of martyrdom and a Pietà, has a St. John which differs but in quality from the one in Sassetta's Dijon panel.





wandered far from their master's methods. Nor need we take much time to trace his influence in Umbria and the Marches, where it was light.¹ It is in Siena alone that we may seek for it, and among his slightly younger contemporaries only, not among those who flourished wholly in the second half of the fifteenth century.

The winsome and at times exquisite Giovanni di Paolo may have been his fellow-pupil under Fei, but in any case he owed more to Sassetta than to any other master. You will see this clearly enough if you look at Giovanni's Madonna, dated 1428, in the Saraceni collection, his triptych in the Siena academy (No. 178), or Mr. Pierpont Morgan's Birth of John. His most delightful painting is a Madonna in a closed tabernacle in the Via delle Terme at Siena, rediscovered and pointed out to me by Mrs. F. M. Perkins, author, with Mr. Heywood, of a most exemplary guide to that town. This Madonna has so much of Stefano's own charm and grace that at first sight one could almost mistake it for his work.

Alongside of Domenico di Bartolo's frescoes in the Scala hospital at Siena there is one repre-

¹ He may have affected Matteo da Gualdo, and the author of the splendid Assumption in the Misericordia at Apiro. Fra Marinangeli da S. Vittoria may have been in closer contact with Sassetta, as will be seen in his Madonna in the library of Fermo, and in a triptych dated 1448 in S. Biagio at Monte Vidon Combatte.

senting the investiture of a new rector, which, while chiefly filled with Domenico's crudities, does betray a softer touch and a more genial feeling, does remind one of Sassetta. Its author, as we know, was Priamo, the brother of the creative Jacopo della Quercia. There exists, however, the fragment of another work of his, done within a year or two of the last, but so startlingly like Sassetta's as to admit of no doubt that he was the latter's pupil, and to prove that if he appears so little to be this in the fresco it is because therein he must have worked under Domenico's directions. This fragment, long ago cut down to an oval containing only the Madonna between six angels, ruined, and repainted, still remains, when seen not too closely, one of the most radiant visions of loveliness in Italian art. So near is it to Sassetta that when I first saw it many years ago, knowing the master less, and nothing whatever of Priamo, and seeing so many resemblances in type with the Chantilly Marriage of Francis to Poverty, I did not hesitate to note it as Stefano's. Now I clearly see under its alluring charm the weaknesses of an inferior artist; documents allow us to infer that it is all that remains of an altarpiece ordered in 1445 by the collegiate church of S. Michele of Volterra. It is now in the gallery of that town. Yet

another minor follower was Piero di Giovanni Ambossi, who in at least one of his signed works echoes his master's sweetest notes. I refer to the standard dated 1434 at Mme. Edouard André's in Paris, representing on one side St. Catherine of Alexandria, and on the other the Crucifixion. It is a pity that so exquisite a work remains practically invisible. Its diaphanous beauty of colour and outline are more fascinating than one will easily find in more ambitious achievements of that or other epochs. His also is the St. Bernardine dated 1439 in the choir of the Osservanza at Siena, and probably the triptych representing an Adoration of the Shepherds, S. Galgano, and a Bishop in S. Agostino at Asciano.

The most remarkable of Sassetta's followers is yet to be mentioned. It was Lorenzo Vecchietta, the wonderful sculptor, delightful painter, and maker of three out of the four real artists with whom native Siennese art closes its story, I mean Francesco di Giorgio, Neroccio di Landi, and Benvenuto di Giovanni. Doubtless in sculpture Vecchietta had other teachers, but Sassetta alone in painting. All his frescoes and panels bear more or less witness to this; none so much, however—and this is significant—as his earliest considerable work, the shrine recently transported from S.

Maria della Scala to the Sienese academy. The outside figures, especially in the Annunciation and Resurrection, are in type, in treatment, in colour, in feeling even, as close to Stefano's as a gifted pupil's work can be to that of his teacher. Finally Matteo di Giovanni himself in his quite earliest works the polyptychs in S. Agostino at Asciano, and at S. Agostino in Anghiari betrays the definite influence of Sassetta.

Sassetta was thus not only one of the few masters in Europe of imaginative design, but the most important painter at Siena during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the channel through which Sienese Trecento traditions passed and became transformed into those of the Quattrocento, for nearly all the later painters of Siena were his offspring.

INDEX

- AMBOSSI**, Piero di Giovanni,
Standard by, in possession of
Mme. André, 69; his St. Bernardine at Siena and triptych at Asciano, 69
- Anghiari**, polyptych by Matteo di Giovanni at, 70
- Asciano**, Sassetta's polyptych at, 54, 56, 57; its resemblance with Lorenzetti's work in Opera del Duomo, 57; polyptych by Matteo di Giovanni in S. Agostino at, 70;
- Assisi**, upper and lower church, Legend of S. Francis, 4-8 (*see* Giotto); Simone Martini's frescoes at, 55
- BARTOLO**, Taddeo di, his S. Francis, in polyptych at Perugia, 43, 55
- Beaumont** (Loir et Cher), Comte de Martel, Sassetta's Francis and Wolf of Gubbio, 25
- Bellini**, Jacopo, 49, 55
- Benvenuto** di Giovanni, 69
- Berlin**, Madonna by Sassetta in, 65; Assumption of the Virgin by Sassetta in Berlin Gallery, 66 note
- Borgo Sansepolcro**, altarpiece of S. Francesco at, 47, 49 *seq.*, 55
- Boston**, U.S.A., Museum of Fine Arts. Buddhist paintings, 12-14
- Botticelli**, Sassetta compared with, 52, 53
- Buddha**, portraits of, 12
- Buddhist saints**, Legend of the five hundred, 12-14
- CHANTILLY**, Sassetta's Marriage of St. Francis to Poverty, 37
- Chiusdino**, altarpiece by Sassetta at, 61; compared with Masolino's panel at Naples, 62
- Cortona**, polyptych by Sassetta at, 59, 60, 61
- DIJON**, Sassetta's Pietà at, 63
- Domenico di Bartolo**, frescoes in Scala hospital, Siena, by, 67
- Dürer**, his Mass of St. Gregory, 12, 14
- FEI**, Paolo di Giovanni, his Birth of the Blessed Virgin, 57; resemblance of his Anne to the figure in Sassetta's work, 57, 58; his children, 58; further relation between him and Sassetta, 58, 64; a trait peculiar to his work, 58, 59; his triptych at Naples, 59; other works by, 59 note; Sassetta's work reminiscent of, 64

- Florence, Giotto's work at S. Croce, 10, 30; Ambrogio's Mass of St. Nicholas in Academy, 55; Sassetta's Triumph of St. Francis in Mr. Berenson's collection, 71; his Baptist, and Beato Raineri, 51, 52; his Madonna, 90, 91
- Fra Angelico, small Epiphany by Sassetta formerly ascribed to, 64
- Fra Diamante, Prato panel probably by him, 65 note
- Fra Filippo, Prato panel ascribed to, 65 note
- Fra Marinangeli da S. Vittoria, 67 note
- Fredi, Bartolo di, 58, 59 note, 60
- GENTILE da Fabriano, 49, 64
- Giorgio, Francesco di, 69
- Giotto, his Legend of S. Francis at Assisi, 4 *seq.*, 10 and note; his work compared with Sassetta's, 22-32; his work at S. Croce, 10, 30; his imagination inferior to Sassetta's, 38
- Giovanni di Paolo, 67; his works at Siena, and in possession of Mr. Pierpont Morgan, 67; his Madonna in the Via delle Terme, Siena, 67
- LANDI, Neroccio di, 69
- Lecceto, frescoes in porch at, 19
- Lorenzetti, Ambrogio, his frescoes at Siena, 18, 19, 31, 55; Sassetta's polyptych at Asciano compared with his work in Opera del Duomo, 57
- MANTEGNA, the S. Prosdocimo in the Brera polyptych, 49
- Martini, Simone, 19, 31, 49; his frescoes at Assisi of the death and burial of St. Martin, 55
- Masaccio, his S. Maria Novella fresco and Berlin birth-plate, Renaissance construction introduced into, as contrasted with Sassetta's Gothic architecture, 54
- Masolino, and Sassetta, 53, 55, 62
- Matteo di Giovanni, his polyptychs at Asciano and Anghiari, 70
- Mells Park, panels by Sassetta at, 63
- Memmi, Lippo, 60
- NAPLES, triptych in the Minutoli Chapel at, by Fei, 59 note; Masolino's panel at, 62
- New Haven, Jarves collection, portions of predella by Sassetta in, 64
- PARIS, Louvre, Madonna and Saints by Fei in, 59 note; Standard by Ambossi in possession of Mme. André, 69; panels by Sassetta with legend of St. Francis in collection of M. Chalandon, 21 *et seq.*
- Perugia, Taddeo di Bartolo's polyptych at, 55
- Pesellino, 64
- Pienza, S. Francesco, Bartolo di Fredi's frescoes, 19 note
- Pisa, the Triumph of Death at, 19
- Pisanello, 49, 55
- Pistoja, Antonio Vite's S. Francis at, 40

Prato panel, ascribed to Fra Filippo, probably by Fra Diamante, 65 note

Priamo, brother of Jacopo della Quercia, Madonna by, at Siena, 67; at Volterra, 68

QUERCIA, Jacopo della, font at S. Giovanni di Siena designed by, 47 note

ROSSINI, Pellegrino di Mariano, 66 and note

SANO di Pietro, pupil of Sassetta, 47; fresco by Sassetta finished by, 65, 66

S. Pietro Ovale, Vanni's Virgin of the Annunciation at, 60

Sassetta, Stefano, 20; his altarpiece in the Osservanza, Siena, 20, 21, 48; his panels of S. Francis, 21 and note, *seq.*; compared with Giotto's frescoes, 22, 32; his poetic faculty of developing legend, 37; his imagination superior to Giotto's, 38; comparison of one of his panels with Raphael's Transfiguration, 42; his drawing of the font for S. Giovanni, 47 and note; his altarpiece of S. Francesco at Borgo Sansepolcro, 47, 49 *seq.*, 55; compared with Botticelli, 52, 53; with Masolino, 53; his Gothic compared with Masaccio's Renaissance forms of construction, 54; his power of individualisation, 54; sensibility to prevailing taste for dress, 54;

his polyptych at Asciano, 54, 56, 57, 58; resemblance of Fei's Anne to his figure of saint, 57, 58; his children, 58; further relation between him and Fei, 58, 59; Last Supper and Four Patron Martyrs in Siena Academy, 58, 59; his Cortona polyptych, 59, 60, 61; his artistic descent, 60; his altarpiece at Chiusdino, 62; four small early figures by, in Siena Academy, 63; his Pietà at Dijon, 63; panels by, in possession of Lady Horner, 63; portions of the predella in Academy at Siena and elsewhere, 63; his Epiphany in Saraceni Collection, 64; his large Madonna in Siena Academy, 65; his Madonna at Berlin, 65; his fresco over the Porta Romana, 65, 66; his Assumption of the Virgin in Berlin, 66 note; pictures executed in his workshop, 66 note; his pupils and followers, 66-70

Siena, school of, 17

— the Osservanza, Sassetta's altarpiece in, 20, 21, 48; the "Ambrose" of, 49; St. Bernardine by Piero di Giovanni Ambossi in choir of, 69

— Academy, Birth of the Virgin by Paolo di Giovanni Fei in, 57; Sassetta's Last Supper and Four Patron Martyrs by Sassetta in, 58; four small early figures by Sassetta in, 63; large Madonna by Sassetta in, 65; triptych by

- Giovanni di Paolo in, 67; Shrine by Vecchietta in, 69, 70
- Siena, Archives, Biccherna tablet by Sassetta in, 63
- S. Domenico, Madonna by Fei at, 59
- Saraceni Collection, panel by Fei in, 59 note; small triptych by Sassetta in, 63; small Epiphany by Sassetta in, 64; Madonna by Giovanni di Paolo in, 67
- Scala hospital, frescoes by Domenico di Bartolo in, 67
- Porta Romana, Sassetta's fresco over, 65, 66
- Via delle Terme, Giovanni di Paolo's Madonna in, 67
- Compagnia di S. Bernardino, polyptych by Fei in, 59 note
- Siena, S. Agostino, triptych by Ambossi in, 69
- S. Domenico, Madonna, by Fei in, 59 note
- THE Triumph of Death, at Pisa, 19
- VANNI, Andrea, 59 note; his Virgin of the Annunciation at S. Pietro Ovile, 66; Sassetta's work reminiscent of, 64
- Vecchietta, Lorenzo, 69; his Shrine in the Sienese Academy, 70
- Vite, Antonio, his S. Francis at Pistoja, 40
- Vivarini, Antonio, 49, 55
- Volterra, Gallery, Madonna by Priamo, formerly in S. Michele, 68

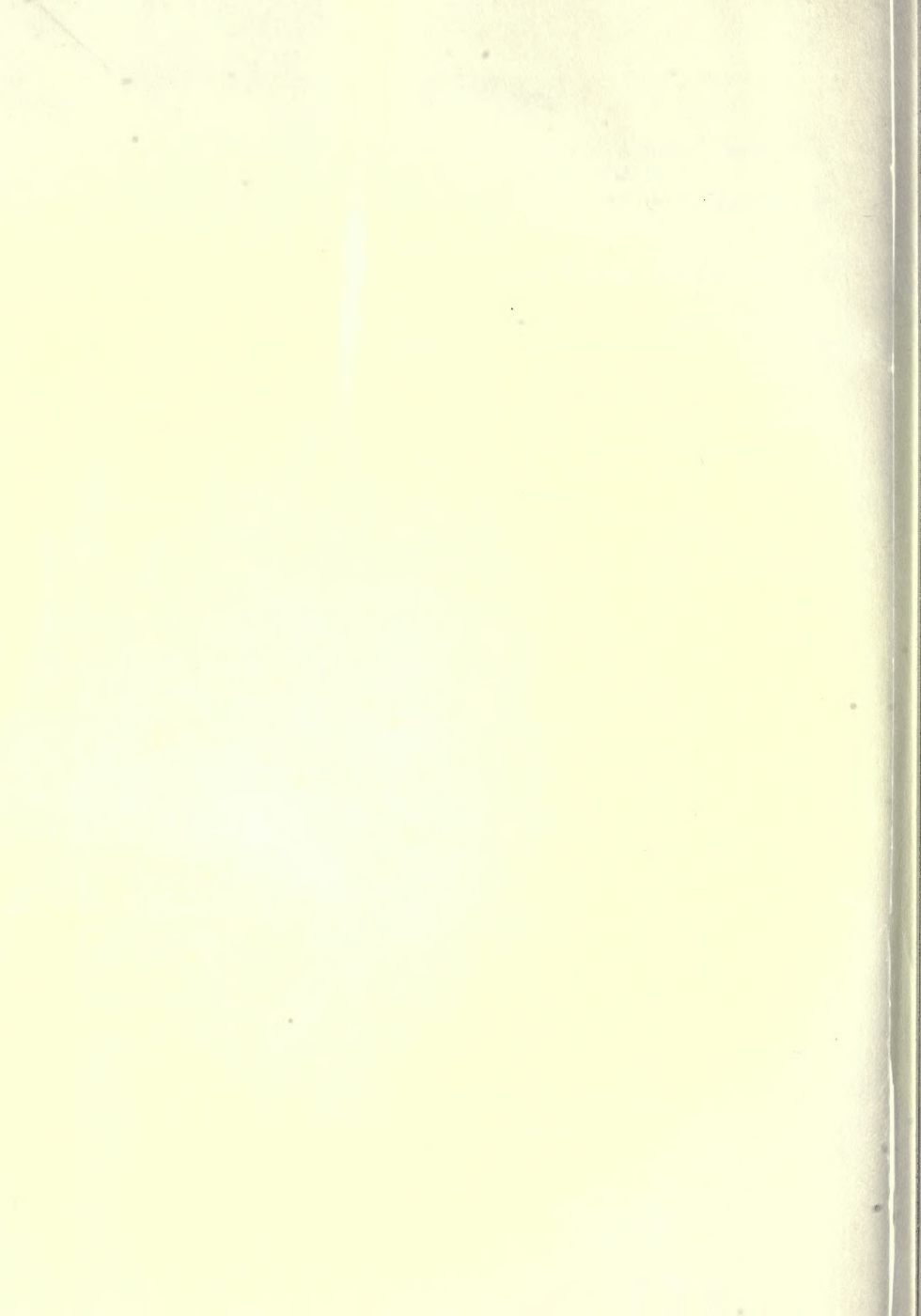
THE END

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London

105

174





**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

